**The Silence Of The Lecters**

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# The Silence Of The Lecters

by A_David

Summary

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>
> “Tea cup,” Hannibal stated. “The saucer may support you, but you hold everything inside of you. Morgan is your saucer. He will stabilize you, but you are the one everything must fall on. It is only natural that you are the responsible one.”

Notes

> Hello! Sorry for the long wait. Here is chapter one of my sequel. I hope you all enjoy! Please let me know in the comments and thank you so much for patiently waiting for me to figure everything out!
>
> Thank you to Child of Lilith who drew my first picture. She is amazing.
>
> As in the last story, Child of Lilith has made a lovely Spotify playlist that we have both been adding music to that has helped me write this and the last story. Here is the link: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/65khRpKmjgRytQWwoG4hqo.
>
> I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

# Chapter 1

# The Silence of the Lecters

Will stepped into the study and looked over the two boys, a few years older now, writing silently at their desks, Hannibal waiting patiently for them to finish working on whatever problem he had given them to work out. Will wandered over to where Hannibal was sitting, having dutifully taken over private lessons with the boys while they found somewhere to live and blend in.

He placed a kiss on Hannibal's cheek, hands on Hannibal's shoulders, looking over the text that was in Hannibal's lap. Something in German. Will had been able to decently pick up on a language or two from Hannibal and sitting in on lessons, but German was never one that he could fully seem to grasp, much too harsh for his tongue.

"Let them have a break after this," Will whispered softly in Hannibal's ear. "It's nearly lunch. I'm sure they're hungry."

Hannibal gave a small nod, stealing a quick kiss from Will.

Will watched as Morgan and Wally continued to write.

Languages were important. Everything they were taught was important. Nothing that a normal school would teach them and nothing that wasn't important for them to know. This was going to be a harsh world that these boys were shoved into and Will and Hannibal needed to make sure they were prepared for anything. Especially if something happened to Hannibal and Will and something was bound to happen to them. It was unavoidable, whether it just be them passing away or being caught, something would happen.

Hannibal had insisted on the curriculum and Will found himself not able to fight Hannibal on it. The mornings were used for learning languages so that the children could blend in wherever they needed to. Morgan had taken much easier to that than Walter had, Will finding that Walter was a little more like Will and Morgan had taken after Hannibal.

After lunch it was memorizing the extensive plans that had been put in place so the boys would know where to run if something did happen. Different exit routes and safe houses for each possible situation that could arrive. Money scattered across the world for the boys as well as any documentation needed, though Walter had become fairly good at falsifying documents. That was another thing that Hannibal insisted that they knew. They needed to know art. It wasn't just a hobby, it was part of survival and Morgan had not been nearly as accepting of it as Walter had.

Medical training was next. Everything Hannibal knew about anything surgical was being taught to them and Will was more than happy to find things for them to practice on, after all, Will needed practice too. Both boys seemed perfectly apt in this, knowing what to do for a muscle tear and what to do for a bullet wound.

Every other day, all day long, they did hand to hand combat. Hannibal taught them self defense and Will would teach them police tactics. Morgan had once again soared in this aspect, leaving Walter far behind, though Walter tried. Strength wasn't Walter's issue. He was far stronger than Morgan and he would get it eventually. It just took more practice and Hannibal was patient, ever so patient with the boys when they didn't understand anything.

Guns were also used frequently. Once more, something that Morgan excelled at. Walter anticipated the recoil too much and could hit his target, but it was never as spot on as Morgan's aim was. Morgan had taken to hunting like a fish to water. He was glorious at it and Hannibal would often gloat about the kid to Will.

Walter was a much kinder soul, Will had found. He enjoyed the quiet contemplation that fishing brought, and he was better at fishing than Morgan. Morgan detested the activity and refused to go near it despite Hannibal's insistence. Water was still something the child struggled with, though Will couldn't blame the boy. The compromise had to be that Morgan was present for fishing lessons so that he at least knew how to fish if the need arose.

Will also trained them on how to live off the land. Most weekends were spent up in the woods on their several acre property, teaching them how to set up tents and take them down, and how to set up shelters if they didn't have a tent. Which things would keep them warm and alive. Different ways to start a fire, different plants to eat and which to avoid, how to clean water properly. How to use a compass and a map or how to find their way with nothing more than stagnant water, a leaf and a paperclip.

Walter held his own far above Morgan in this aspect. Morgan could survive, but Walter would thrive. Walter picked up on living off the land, knew everything by heart the moment that Will would explain it to them.

Morgan reigned when it came to books and defense, and Walter reigned when it came to survival and protection. They were the perfect push and pull. A yin and yang. They complimented each other and were strong where the other wasn't. They could live through anything if they were together, and they could survive if apart.

Walter had taken well to gutting and cleaning any kills or fish they caught. He knew how to properly take care of each animal and how to obtain pelts to sell. Morgan had been better at learning how to cook their catches, Hannibal doing his best to teach each boy how to create filling meals with hardly any ingredients.

This weekend was a trip that Will hadn't honestly approved of, but Hannibal had deemed it necessary. And Will knew it was, but he wasn't sure how the boys would react to it. Dinner on Friday would be drugged and the boys would be taken, if they didn't notice the drugs first, out on their property somewhere with nothing more than bare essentials. A single bottle of water, a map and compass, a handful of matches and a single solar blanket. They needed to find their way back home before the end of the weekend or Will and Hannibal would go and collect them. Hannibal had been more than open about the fact that he thought Will coddled them too much and they needed more strict training, but Will was certain that Morgan and Walter could figure it out. They were perfect opposites.

Morgan was the first one up from his seat and passed Hannibal a full sheet of paper in perfect scrolls. "*Gehen Sie zum Mittagessen und machen Sie eine Pause. Treffen Sie sich hier um eins, um unseren Unterricht fortzusetzen,*" Hannibal instructed, Will only able to pick out a few words here and there. "*Gute Arbeit heute.*" *(Go for lunch and take a break. Meet here at one to continue our class. Good job today.)*

"*Danke schön, Vater*," Morgan replied back, glancing up at Will. "Has lunch been made?" *(Thank you, Father.)*

Will shook his head. "You two are going to prepare it today." Morgan gave a small nod and left the room, leaving a quiet Walter behind, who had his head in his hand and a frustrated look on his face. "Help him," Will whispered to Hannibal.

Hannibal shook his head. "He has to learn this. Or he needs the strength to ask for help. You can't just whisk in and save him. There isn't always a knight in shining armor to call on."

Will frowned, but he stayed quiet, knowing Hannibal was right. Hannibal was much more detached from the children than Will was. But it was what was needed. Their dynamic was a perfect contrast just as Morgan and Walter were. The strong and the soft. Both needed.

"Father?" Walter finally asked with a defeated sigh, looking up. Hannibal raised a single eyebrow and Walter frowned, but he knew the rules. One only spoke the language they were learning that day all through class. It was the best way to learn. "*Ich brauche Hilfe. Bitte hilf mir*," Walter muttered softly, head lowered in shame. Will knew hilfe, Walter was asking for help. *(I need help. Please help me.)*

Hannibal rose from his chair and pulled from Will's grip, stepping over to Walter's desk and kneeling down. "*Sie kennen die Antwort darauf. Was ist es auf Englisch?*" Hannibal asked in a kind tone. *(You know the answer to that. What is it in English?)*

Walter sighed, fingers tangling in his hair. "*Auf Englisch?*" (In English?)

"*Fühlen Sie sich frei, es durchzuarbeiten und aus dem Englischen zu übersetzen. Daran ist nichts auszusetzen*," Hannibal replied with a small smile, hand reaching out to take Walter's hand. Walter gave another huff of air and looked like he didn't exactly understand what Hannibal had said, but he got enough to answer back. *(Feel free to work it through and translate from English. There's nothing wrong with that.)*

"The answer is that I would need to apply pressure to the wound, but not remove the knife. It could make them bleed out."

"*Perfekt. Jetzt auf Deutsch,*" Hannibal pressed, giving Walter's hand a small squeeze before releasing it. *(Perfect. And in German?)*

"Why can Morgan understand this better than me?" Walter asked, dropping his pencil down on the desk and laying his head on the unfinished worksheet. "He's better than me at everything."

"He's younger," Will stated, stepping up to the desk and taking Walter's shoulder with a reassuring squeeze. Walter lifted his head from the desk with a curious look. "His mind is still in early development. It's easier for him to grasp the concepts, he absorbs them because his brain chemistry is still in a language learning stage. He also grew up learning German from Alana and Margot. But that doesn't mean that you can't if you keep working at it and you need to keep working at it. This is-"

"I know, I know," Walter interrupted. "It's important and it could save our lives someday. You say that all of the time Dad."

"Because it's true," Will answered, brushing some of the teen's hair from his face. "Molly would be proud of you. You're so smart, Walter. I know you can figure this out, just like you figured out how to rewire the chandelier in the dining room with me." Walter rolled his eyes, obviously still comparing him to the six year old who had left the room. "Morgan couldn't do that," Will pointed out with a smile. "You two are both brilliant, but in different ways. You're better with your hands, you're a kinesthetic learner. There's nothing wrong with that. Morgan couldn't build that catapult you made. You're just smart in different aspects."

"You both compliment each other beautifully," Hannibal added, breaking his own rule for the sake of the kid. "Like a-"

"Tea set," Walter finished with a nod. "Am I the teacup or the saucer?"

"Tea cup," Hannibal stated. "The saucer may support you, but you hold everything inside of you. Morgan is your saucer. He will stabilize you, but you are the one everything must fall on. It is only natural that you are the responsible one." Walter gave a small nod in understanding. "*Zurück zu deinem Studium. Beantworten Sie diese Frage und Sie können mit Ihrem Bruder zu Mittag essen.*" *(Back to your studies. Answer this question and you can have lunch with your brother.)*

With a new found enthusiasm, Walter finished up his page with scribbles and handed it to Hannibal before getting from his chair. "*Danke dir. Ihr beide,*" he said as he rushed from the room to head to the kitchen. *(Thank you. You both.)*

Hannibal glanced over the page and gave a sigh, standing up. "He tries," Hannibal stated, heading over to his own desk and placing the paper beside Morgan's. "I just don't think he quite grasps it."

"You said it yourself," Will reminded, following Hannibal and wrapping his arms around the man's waist, hiding his face in Hannibal's shoulder blades. "They compliment each other. In everything that Walter is weak in, Morgan is strong and vice versa. They will be fine."

"And if they're separated?" Hannibal asked. "We've always had them together. Maybe we need to separate them. Teach them-"

"You can't separate them," Will argued, his grip tightening so that Hannibal couldn't give him a disapproving look. "They need each other. You know that."

"That's the problem," Hannibal pointed out, hand resting on Will's and his thumb gently caressing at Will's skin. "If something were to happen to one of them, the other wouldn't be able to cope. They need to be separated until they can be brought back together."

"That will devastate Walter."

"He needs better control of his emotions."

"Hannibal," Will stated sternly. "Walter needs Morgan. Morgan leads by example, Walter learns from him. You can't separate them. Not right now. Wait until they're a little older. A little more developed."

Hannibal sighed and pulled himself free from Will's grip, fingers playing with the silver band on his ring finger. "You're too soft on them."

"They're still children, Hannibal," Will defended. "I know you might not remember what it was like to be a child, but-"

"I remember," Hannibal cut in, eyes cold. "All too well. My upbringing was no different from theirs, I was just taught different subjects. And you remember what it's like to move across the country. They're no different from you either."

"I just want them safe."

"As do I," Hannibal stated with a small sigh, stopping with the playing of his ring. "We just have different opinions on how to get there."

"We'll discuss it after this weekend?" Will asked instead, knowing not to push the subject much more. "If they get back safely, we can separate them and build their skills that way. Work on whatever they are having trouble with. If they can't find their way back together then they aren't strong enough to be alone. They continue to have classes together. Is that fair?"

Hannibal was quiet for a moment in thought before looking over Will who had folded his arms over his chest, waiting for an answer. "Yes," Hannibal agreed with a small nod.

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Morgan sat on the front steps of their home, a large estate that had an ancient castle feel to it. Something that Morgan found a little overbearing but that Walter had fallen in love with, exploring every inch of the old manor with feverish want to find any hidden secrets, pulling Morgan along on his journeys.

The book in Morgan's hand was dull and didn't hold his attention well. His eyes kept drifting over to where Walter was busy juggling a soccer ball, playing with the ball whenever he had a free moment. Morgan knew it recentered Walter when Walter was frustrated. It was something he was good at and something that Morgan wasn't. Morgan had also noticed that the sport had pulled at Walter when baseball wasn't quite as popular where they kept moving to. Which was fine for Morgan. It meant that there weren't anymore baseballs shattering windows or small blurs darting by his head.

Morgan did his best to ignore the jealousy that came off of Walter almost the whole day. Walter was kind to him when they weren't in classes together, but when class was in session, Walter was cold towards Morgan. Morgan knew it wasn't personal, but it still bothered him. Walter didn't need to be jealous. There were plenty of things that he couldn't do that Walter could. Morgan still struggled with how to orient. He was hopeless with directions when there weren't street names. And Walter was better at giving bodies stitches than Morgan was. Walter could build anything he wanted to from anything laying around and it always blew Morgan's mind that the puzzle had been put together when Morgan hadn't even considered a puzzle being there.

Morgan jumped from his thoughts as the ball bounced beside him and Walter rushed over. "Sorry," Walter said quickly as he rushed past Morgan to catch the runaway ball. Morgan closed his book and rose to his feet, stretching. "Do you want to play with me for a bit?"

"We need to get back for class," Morgan stated.

Walter lifted his wrist up and looked over his watch. "We still have ten minutes."

"You know what Father is like if we aren't there five minutes early. If you're early, you're on time. If you're on time, you're late."

Walter smiled. "I take your Lik Hock Yap Ivan and raise you Evelyn Waugh." He went back to juggling the ball on his knees. "Punctuality is the virtue of the bored."

"You're going to get in trouble again."

Walter scoffed and caught the ball from the air, looking over Morgan. "You know Dad gets upset with Father if father denies me dinner. And I have snacks hidden in my room. I don't care if I can't eat for a meal or two. Besides, isn't that supposed to be teaching me something anyways?" Walter flashed a bright smile at Morgan. "Play with me for a bit."

Morgan inhaled deeply, looking around their estate for a moment and then across the street where equally large houses all stood, old and ancient and gothic, though none were quite as large as the house that the new freaks that had just moved into. The weird gay family with far too much money. The strange family that never left their home. Maybe they were vampires. Or so the rumors went.

Morgan set his book on the step and turned to Walter who continued to smile. He dropped the ball to the grass and kicked it over to Morgan who uncoordinatedly stopped the ball with an expensive dress shoe that Father would be irate if it got scuffed, and passed the ball back to Walter.

Walter had to race after the badly directed kick, the ball rolling out and into the street. Walter stopped, breathing hard as a shoe caught the ball. He looked up and was met with the hauntly blue eyes of David Berkowicz, the boy who lived across the street and enjoyed to torture Morgan, though Walter took the brunt of the abuse to protect the younger boy.

"*Ist das dein ball, Vampir?"* David taunted in German. *(Is that your ball, vampire?)*

Walter was silent for a moment, doing his best to translate the words and gave a small nod. "*Ja,* give it back David."

"I thought that vampires couldn't go out in the sunlight," David continued on.

Walter rolled his eyes and tried to reach for the ball with his foot, knowing better than to try to bend down for the ball, last time having been kicked in the face and coming back in with a bloody nose that he had played off as his fault, though he knew neither of his fathers believed him for a moment.

David moved the ball back and away from Walter. "Where are your *schwuchtel* parents?" *(Fagot.)*

"*Sie sind keine Schwuchteln*," Morgan defended, his voice close behind Walter. *(They are not fagots.)*

"Ezra, go back inside," Walter instructed, the fake name feeling weird as it left his tongue. "You're going to be late for class. I'll be in when David gives the ball back."

"Follow your brother's instructions," David said, eyes not leaving Walter. "Your brother and I have some things to discuss."

"We aren't brothers," Walter grumbled.

"Does the discussion include fists?" Morgan asked simply, not paying any mind to Walter's hurtful comment, coming to stand beside Walter now. Morgan glanced between the harsh looks of the two older boys. Walter's was cold and David's smug.

Ignoring Morgan, David continued. "Bend over and get your ball, Grant. It's the only way that you're going to get it back."

Morgan was quiet as he watched, knowing that Walter wouldn't fight. Walter wasn't one to show aggression. He was passive, kind, and gentle. Walter knew how to defend himself perfectly fine from all of their training, getting the ball back should have happened before this conversation had begun, but that wasn't who Walter was. Walter was a peacemaker.

Without a word, Walter leaned forward, reaching for the ball still held under David's foot and Morgan watched, unsurprised as David's foot made quick contact with Walter's face. Walter gasped, and stood up, hand clutched over his nose that was now bleeding profusely. Walter took a few steps back, using the hem of his t-shirt to try to stop the bleeding.

Morgan wasn't going to do a thing, let Walter fight his own battles, when David laughed. Morgan sighed with a roll of his eyes. He could sit by and be emotionless, it was easy for him, especially after his mothers had died, he shut everything off. It made dealing with the bad things easier. But he could turn it back on any time that he wanted to and right now he wanted to. Walter needed his help.

Morgan raced forward and tackled David to the sidewalk, ignoring the way the rough concrete scraped up both of his knees. Instead, David and him rolled around until David was on top of Morgan, much stronger than Morgan was. Morgan met David's eyes and could just make out both the scared child and the cold glare of someone far older than Morgan before David's fist collided with Morgan's face.

It was curious. He didn't feel the pain right away. He was more dazed and stuck in thought. Who was David when he attacked the two of them? Was he the parents that hurt him, disguised under layers of excuses? Or did David desperately want to be on the other side of that punch?

Walter stared for a moment, watching, unsure what exactly to do before instincts that had been drilled into him for the last two years kicked in. He ran to David and took the collar of his shirt, dragging David with bloodied hands and a still flooding nose, off of Morgan.

His arm wrapped around David's neck and his hand clasped at his wrist, keeping his grip tight around David. "You touch him again, you're dead," Walter hissed in David's ear. There was a sharp pain as the air was forced from his lungs as David's elbow plunged into Walter's ribcage.

Walter's grip faltered and David pulled from it, leaving Walter gasping and hunched over.

Morgan scrambled to his feet as David fell to his knees, coughing from the choke hold that Walter had him locked into. Morgan pushed David onto his back and dug one of his knees into David's ribs, snatching up his arm. With a strong, practiced movement, Morgan pulled at David's arm against his thigh and more felt than heard the snap of David's arm.

David gave a cry of pain and Morgan released him, stepping back at the shout of his name from a voice that was hardly ever raised in anger. Morgan breathed hard, eyes dark as a brutal grip snatched up his shoulder, pulling him further away from David.

"That is enough!" Hannibal hissed, passing Morgan over to Will to look over.

Will dropped to his knees, hands brushing back Morgan's dark hair and taking in the deep purple that was beginning to surround one of his eyes. Morgan would be fine. Will got back to his feet, a tight arm wrapping around Morgan to hold him in place, as if Morgan were going to attack again.

Hannibal was at Walter's side next, trying to straighten the still gasping and now crying boy back up. "Breathe," Hannibal ordered. "Through your mouth." His hands took either side of Walter's face, frightened eyes meeting Hannibal's. "Grant, focus. Breathe." With a struggling inhale, Walter tumbled against Hannibal, finally able to breathe freely. Hannibal hugged him tightly for a moment and once the boy's breathing was steady, he pushed Walter back, looking over his face. "Your nose

might be broken. We'll get you taken care of. Allen, take the children inside," Hannibal instructed, pushing Walter towards Will who had an arm outstretched to the boy.

Hannibal glanced towards the child that was wailing on the ground and had pulled concerned eyes to windows of the surrounding houses. So much for laying low. People tended to mind their own business in rich neighborhoods, more occupied with themselves and able to pay off police if anything arose, but eyes would be on them now.

Hannibal walked over to the kid and knelt down beside him, looking over the work that his two sons had done. His arm was broken, but other than that there didn't look to be anything else wrong with him other than being covered in what could have only been Walter's blood.

"*Du bist das Kind von Berkowicz, oder?*" Hannibal asked, having the boy sit up. Snot and tears ran down his face, but Hannibal didn't much care about this child. He knew that the kid had been tormenting his own sons and that it would only be a matter of time before the two boys didn't ignore it and Hannibal was curious as to which child had started it. The boy sniffled with a nod and Hannibal pulled the kid to his feet with a strong grip. "*Es wird Dir gut gehen.*" *(You're Berkowicz's kid, aren't you? You'll be fine.)*

With a strong stride that had the kid struggling to keep up, Hannibal led the child up to his parent's house, knocking on the door, turning on the charm with a kind smile as the door opened.

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Walter jumped as the soccer ball was thrown to him and Hannibal entered the kitchen. Walter caught the ball against his chest, his eyes going to Hannibal whose expression was strangely calm despite the anger that Walter could see there in his eyes.

He had seen Hannibal upset before. Maybe not upset. That wasn't quite right. He had witnessed Hannibal being put out by someone. He had seen Hannibal annoyed and irritated, but those emotions had easily been soothed away by Will. He had never seen Hannibal angry before and he didn't want to know how strong the wrath of God was going to be when Hannibal snapped and bathed the earth in blood.

Was this one of those times?

Walter set the ball on the counter and turned his attention back to Will who had been helping clean all of the blood from his face while pieces of toilet paper were shoved up his nose to try to stop the rest of the bleeding.

"Would someone like to explain what happened?" Hannibal asked into the quiet room, voice controlled and steady, though the fire in his eyes didn't dim.

"Hanni-"

"Will," Hannibal interrupted. "The boys have voices, do they not? Let them speak."

"He took Walter's ball," Morgan stated from where he sat at the counter in one of the bar seats, an icepack held to one of his eyes, both knees bandaged. Hannibal's eyes left Walter and turned their attention to the younger boy. "Walter tried to get it back, he kicked Walter."

Hannibal gave a small nod, the blaze doused slightly. "Self defense?" Morgan gave a single nod, not sure he wanted to speak, and Hannibal sighed. "Morgan, you're alright?"

"Fine," Morgan answered dully.

"Let's take a look at you, Walter," Hannibal said, voice softer now. He held out his hand to Walter who glanced up at Will as if asking for protection. Will simply nudged Walter on and Walter trudged over to Hannibal who wrapped his arm around Walter's shoulder and led the boy to the hall bath. Hannibal sat Walter on the toilet and then dug under the sink to find the first aid kit that was there. "Why did you let him hurt you?"

"He wasn't going to give the ball back unless he got a hit in," Walter muttered, the speaking making his nose ache. "It was no big deal until Morgan jumped in. I had to help him."

"This shouldn't have occurred in the first place," Hannibal muttered, pulling out some alcohol wipes and taking Walter's chin in his hand. He removed the two bunches of toilet paper from the boy's nose and tossed them away. "Try to stay still, M*angustėli.*" *(Little Mongoose.)*

"Why do you call me that?" Walter winced as Hannibal cleaned his nose. "You call dad all sorts of pet names and Morgan is little rabbit. Why am I a fucking mongoose?" He hissed as the wipe touched at the bridge of his nose.

"You remind me of Will," Hannibal explained, pulling the wipe back, fingers gingerly pressing on Walter's nose. "Language please. You know better." Walter tried to rip himself from Hannibal's grip, but Hannibal held the boy still. "Hush, M*angustėli,"* Hannibal instructed gently. "*Nejudėk*." *(Don't move.)*

"What does a mongoose have to do with Dad?" Walter whimpered as Hannibal's fingers carefully pushed into each side of his nose.

"Does it hurt to breathe through your nose?" Hannibal questioned. Walter gave a small nod. "I think it's broken, *mangustėli*. I can set it here if you would like."

"I have a choice?" Walter asked curiously, eyes wide.

"You always have a choice." Hannibal stopped working on Walter's nose and looked over the boy's face before understanding his question more fully. "We've had this conversation before when you were younger. Walter, why do you think we don't make Morgan learn how to fish?"

"Because he threw a temper tantrum?" Walter asked back with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Because you have a choice, Walter," Hannibal stated strongly, digging back into his med kit, pulling out a syringe and a bottle of liquid. "Would you like me to set your nose for you? I can take you to the hospital if you would rather."

"I trust you, Father," Walter answered with a decided voice, one that made Hannibal smile lightly as he filled the syringe. "You didn't answer about the mongoose thing."

"You are strong and protective like your dad." Hannibal reached back out and cradled one of Walter's cheeks and pressed the needle in next to his nose, pushing the numbing agent into Walter's veins. "But you have a hot headed temper."

"And Morgan is a rabbit because...?" Walter questioned.

"Gentle, childlike, kind." Walter frowned at the comparison, the needle feeling odd as it was pulled from his skin. He knew Hannibal preferred Morgan, but he didn't think that Hannibal would be so forthcoming with the information. "We need to talk about this idea that you have about yourself and what Will and I are doing for you. You are thinking of our lessons as a requirement, a responsibility that is being forced on you. This is not the case. We have always tried to make it a choice."

"Are you saying that I don't have to keep studying?" Walter asked in confusion, reaching up to touch his nose at the odd numbness that was settling in. Hannibal quickly pulled his hand away. "I could go to school like a normal kid? I don't have to shoot guns or learn languages anymore?"

"It is a possibility that we can discuss if that is something you truly want," Hannibal muttered, carefully touching at Walter's nose once more. "Do you feel that?"

"Not really," Walter answered. "So you're saying I can be normal?"

"I am saying that you have a choice here, Walter." Hannibal gave a small nod and gently tipped Walter's head back to get a better look at the kid's nose. "And I would think carefully about the right choice before you jump to what it is you want. Will and I have worked very hard to teach you and continue to teach you everything we have ever learned." He brought Walter's head back down and looked over the child's questioning eyes.

"So we can kill like you," Walter stated in nearly a question. "You're making us mini soldiers."

Hannibal tipped his head to the side curiously. "We do not want you to be killers," he stated strongly, surprising Walter. "We are giving you the tools you need to live if worst comes to worst."

"Because you and Dad can't stop killing, is what you mean," Walter pressed, doing his best to understand his screwed up world that he had been dragged into. Had picked to go into.

Hannibal was silent for a moment, avoiding the question with another answer that was just as true. "We want you two to live full and happy lives. There are people who are always going to be hunting your dad and me and we need you two to be safe."

"Why?" Walter challenged, feeling a hurt rage build up in his sternum and along his arms.

"Because losing you and your brother-"

"He's not my brother," Walter grumbled.

"-terrifies the both of us."

Walter blinked several times, taking in the words. "You?" he asked in shock. "You don't care what happens to me."

"What gave you that idea?" Hannibal asked softly, stunned at the comment. He reached up and pressed once more at Walter's nose and stood up. "Come here, Walter." He pulled Walter to his feet and turned the boy around. "Close your eyes."

Walter rolled his eyes, but did as he was told with a huff of air through his rather numb nose. "I know you like Morgan more than me," Walter stated in answer to Hannibal's question.

"This isn't going to be pleasant," Hannibal warned, finger's going to either side of Walter's nose. "You're going to hear everything when I push it back into place."

"I heard it break. I doubt it will be much different."

"On three, ready?" Hannibal asked, finger's finding where the bone was misaligned. "*Vienas du trys*." Hannibal pressed on the boy's nose and could feel the bones shift back into place and Walter shifted uncomfortably in Hannibal's grip, the crackle loud in the small bathroom. "Nearly done, M*angustėli. Aš pažadu.*" He turned Walter around and had him sit back down. Hannibal carefully took some gauze and rolled it up, pressing it into each side of Walter's nose to make sure that the nose would keep its correct position, and then added some tape over his nose to help keep the gauze in place. "*Ar kuri nors kita jūsų dalis yra sužeista? Tavo šonkauliai-*" *(I promise. Is any other part of you injured? Your ribs-)*

"I'm fine," Walter interrupted, pushing Hannibal's hands away from his body.

Walter normally tried to keep his conversations between him and Hannibal in English, but he knew that if Hannibal began speaking Lithuanian then he expected that Walter would follow along, that language coming easier to him than most, though only the universe knew why that was. Walter found himself slipping into the other language when he was upset too. It gave him something to hide behind. Words that were his, but weren't his at the same time.

"You're doing well with your Lithuanian," Hannibal commented, giving the boy what he wanted and starting to clean up the mess. "You understand it better than your German."

"German is hard," Walter grumbled with a frown, eyebrows furrowed. "There's so many extra words that don't exist in English, that we don't use in English. At least in French it's based in Latin. I already knew some of it."

"German is Latin based."

"Different forms of Latin," Walter argued. "Not the Latin that English, French and Italian are based in."

"That's not entirely true," Hannibal corrected. "German and English are Indo-European languages stemming from the same Germanic language family and-"

"I don't care, Hannibal," Walter shot at Hannibal sharply, the rage still swirling deep in him.

Hannibal paused his work and glanced over at Walter who sat with his arms folded and his shoulders slumped. "You only call me Hannibal when I have done something to upset you," Hannibal pointed out, going back to work. "What have I done?" Walter didn't say a word, didn't look up, just pouted at the wall. Hannibal gave a small nod, folded his arms that were covered in Walter's blood and leaned against the sink. "You're upset that I have not explained why I prefer Morgan over you."

"Damn straight."

"Language, Walter," Hannibal warned, eyes sharp. "You are more than well aware of house rules."

"I thought I had choices," Walter recalled with a sarcastic jab, looking up at Hannibal with a pointed glare. "Is it only Morgan who has choices now? Or do I have choices when it suits you?" Hannibal didn't answer, letting Walter rant to better understand what the boy wanted. "*Aš tiesiog tavo marionetė. Morganas yra tavo karalius.*" *(I'm just your puppet. Morgan is your king.)*

"*Jūs tikrai tobulėjate, Walter,*" Hannibal complimented. (You are really improving, Walter.)

"You're not even saying I'm wrong!" Walter shouted, rising to his feet to look at Hannibal who still stood calmly at the sink, letting the boy's emotions run their course. "You treat Morgan like when he walks on the ground gold sprouts from his steps."

"*Mangustėli-"*

"*Negalima manęs taip vadinti!"* Walter ordered, teeth clenched. "*Tai taip pat erzina, kaip tu visą laiką rami! Ar drausminsi mane, ar ką nors padarysi?*" *(Don't call me that! It's also annoying how calm you are all the time! Will you discipline me or will you do something?)*

"Are you wanting to be disciplined?" Hannibal questioned, voice not raising in volume in the slightest and Walter wondered if that was just to piss him off. "Other than swearing in the house, I do not think you have broken any rules. I do not believe you need to be disciplined."

"I'm raising my voice at you," Walter pointed out hotly. "You hate when I do that!"

"I dislike when you don't have valid concerns and are just upset for the sake of being upset."

"*Teisingi rūpesčiai?*" Walter tried to snort out laughter, but nothing came out, only a dull ache from the medicine begging to wear off. Walter winced, a hand going to his nose. *(The right worries.)*

"You need to take some painkillers. You'll be wanting them for the next few days."

"I don't want medicine. I want to know why I'm the second favorite," Walter argued. "I want to know why only Will seems to care about me. I want to know why Morgan is picked for everything over me. What do you do for me that's different from Morgan that makes me special? Because I don't feel special around you Hannibal. You don't care about me, I know it."

"You think that I give Morgan special treatment," Hannibal said with a small nod, putting the truth out for Walter to fully hear. "That I treat him better than you because I believe he is a gift from the gods. Is that what you're trying to say? Because that is what I am hearing."

"*Negalima manęs psichoanalizuoti. Aš nesu tavo pacientas." (Don't psychoanalyze me. I am not your patient.)*

"*Ne,*" Hannibal agreed. "*Tu esi mano sūnus.*" *(No. You are my son.)*

Walter groaned, hands becoming fists. "*Nustokite šokinėti aplink klausimą,Hannibal. Pasakyk man kodėl!*" *(Stop jumping around the question, Hannibal. Tell me why!)*

"You won't believe me, even if I told you the truth," Hannibal said with a deep breath, looking away from the angry boy whose face had gone red.

"*Išbandyk mane,*" Walter hissed through his teeth. *(Try me.)*

Hannibal reached out and took hold of Walter's shoulder, pulling Walter into a hug, shooting enough shock through Walter that it had to take the place of the anger in his body because there just wasn't enough room to house the two emotions simultaneously. Hannibal's gentle fingers caressed Walter's dark hair and he leaned his head against Walter's.

"*Aš tave myliu, mangustėli. Ne daugiau ir ne mažiau kaip Morgan*." Hannibal's voice was soft, barely above a whisper and Walter had to strain to hear the words. "I do not show you the same emotion that I do Morgan because you are older. He is still learning and growing. You are set in your ways and Will has done a wonderful job of raising you. I do not coddle you because I want you to be strong. I want you to be responsible. I want you to be independent. I want you to be able to protect Morgan. That doesn't mean that I don't care about you, *mangustėli.*" *(I love you, little mongoose. No more and no less than Morgan.)*

Walter could feel tears sting at his eyes and his hands became fists in the stupid suits that Hannibal liked to wear. He closed his eyes and carefully hid his face further in Hannibal's chest.

"*Tu man be galo ypatinga.*" Hannibal tightened his grip on Walter, closing his eyes as the boy shook in his grasp, most likely crying. "You asked for something that I do specifically with you and not Morgan?" Walter nodded. "I do not hold any conversation with him in Lithuanian. Not even with Will. That is strictly for us." *(You are extremely special to me.)*

"Why?"

"*Nes jūs vienintelis jį uždirbote.*" *(Because you are the only one who has earned it.)*

# Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Walter glanced down at his frozen hand that had a spoon halfway dipped into the soup and finished the motion, scooping up some of the broth. He placed it into his mouth and did his best to keep his face from showing any sort of emotion. It was wrong. The flavor profile was wrong. Salty. Far too salty. And Hannibal wouldn't over season something. Never once had Hannibal ever over seasoned anything. Everything was always absolutely perfect because he couldn't stand it to be anything less than perfect.

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to my friends for their help.

# The Silence of the Lecters

Blue gymnastic mats lined the floor like carpet and the room was filled with various work out equipment. Grey clouds outside darkened the windows, promising rain. A box fan wheezed in the corner, doing nothing to lower the temperature of the muggy and sweat thick room.

Hannibal had an emergency with work, whatever work Hannibal did. The two boys weren't exactly sure what it was Hannibal did on days where he was busy, but Walter was nearly certain that it had nothing to do with work.

Today, Will was running their combat training. Sparing today. Normally Walter didn't mind, able to take it easy on Morgan, but when one of their parents stepped in, Walter was in for a run around.

Walter stood in gym shorts, tennis shoes and a tank top, sweat beading down his face as he tried to catch his breath through his open mouth, nose still taped up with gauze and a deep purple. Old worn black hand wraps were twisted around each of his hands tightly like a second skin.

Morgan, in a similar outfit, sat to the side, drinking water and watching, waiting for his turn to go against Will, who still took it easy on the younger kid. Walter knew he wasn't going to get special treatment. He never did. But his talk with Hannibal the night before had put things into a new perspective. They were conditioning him to take over if something happened to them. They would never admit to such a thing out loud, saying it was all to protect Morgan, but Walter knew better.

Walter glanced around the familiar room. There were many days spent in this room. And many more bruises that came with this room, more than Walter could ever hope to count. He was often so covered he wasn't sure if he could remember a time when his skin wasn't marked by mustard yellows or blacks and blues. But the injuries sustained were good injuries. Signs of hard work, or so Will would say.

Walter's eyes returned to Will who stood, curls damp with sweat, breathing hard as well. His right arm had blood dripping down it from Walter having tackled him into a seated arm row machine and the exposed corner of a metal bar sliced at Will's bicep. Will had congratulated him on the attack, but Walter didn't feel like he had done much more than hurt the man who had once been kind and gentle and was much colder now, enjoying the pain and the nightmares nearly as much as Hannibal did.

"Again," Will instructed, hands going back up in fists, body turned sideways from Walter to make himself a smaller target, a lower center of gravity to make sure his balance was strong.

Walter widened his stance and looked over Will carefully. The rules were easy. It was takedowns today. Anything to get Will on the ground and immobile. Anything goes. There were no cheap shots when your life was in danger.

Walter took a step forward and gasped, eyes watering as Will punched him in the face. Walter stumbled back, hand at his nose that had crackled horribly in his ears. He could feel the gauze growing wet with blood and he pulled it from his nose, tossing it onto the blue mat, leaning over and letting his nose drip from a moment.

"Father's not going to be happy that he has to reset this," Walter grumbled, pulling his tank top up and blowing into it, dying the grey fabric a deep red mess, nose crying in pain.

“You left yourself open Walter. You know better,” Will answered, not at all sounding sorry for the more than cheap shot taken. His parents didn’t normally take the cheap shots. “Again.”

Walter spit blood from his mouth and wiped at his nose with the back of his hand, ignoring the pain. He stood back upright and let the blood drip down over his lips and chin and onto his already ruined shirt.

Walter took in Will’s stance once more. He took a step to the outside, opposite of where Will was facing and out of the way of his outstretched fist. Walter stepped on Will’s front most foot, pinning him down, and grabbed his wrist. His free hand shot out across Will’s center, blocking Will’s quickly coming other punch, elbowing Will in the face as hard as he could.

With his unused leg, Walter brought his knee up and into the back of Will’s knee, sending Will off balance and tumbling into the mats. With grip still tight on Will’s wrist, Walter’s other hand found Will’s shoulder and pushed him into his stomach, arm now trapped behind Will’s back and pushed up. Walter pushed all of the weight of his knee into Will’s back, and pushed up on Will’s arm until Will gasped in pain.

Walter released Will and scrambled away from him, breathing hard, tired, wanting water desperately. He pressed his shirt back against his bleed nose and looked over Will as Will untangled himself and pushed up onto his knees, covered in drops of Walter’s blood.

“Good,” Will said with a nod, hands on his knees with a deep breath. He got back up to his feet, curls wild, eyes down on Walter whose face was beet red and looked like he would rather be doing absolutely anything else but this. “Again.”

“I’m tired,” Walter said in a muffled voice through his shirt. “You busted my nose again. Can I be done for today?” Walter watched Will hesitate strangely against the question, the room silent for a moment, Morgan’s interest now back on the sparring instead of whatever book it had been mentally lost in.

“No,” Will answered eventually, rising back to his feet. “Again.”

Walter’s teeth clenched and he closed his eyes at the ache that was pulling at his muscles. He wouldn’t be able to sleep tonight until Hannibal helped with all of the knots. Not to mention that Will was being unreasonable. Walter felt physically incapable of obeying the order. Usually when either of the boys stated they were done or had had enough, both Will and Hannibal listened. Will knew that Walter didn’t exaggerate his exhaustion. What made today different?

“Tomorrow,” Walter tried again. “I can’t do anymore today. If I try to get up I’m going to fall.”

It had been hours. Surely Will understood. Will looked just as spent as Walter felt and he still had to work with Morgan. What was his drive? Will always seemed to keep going. What made him keep going?

Will’s eyes were expressionless, taking on a hue much like Hannibal’s that Walter didn’t like. “Again,” he said firmly.

With a clear shot of dislike at Will, Walter tried to stand, wavering, crumpling back to the mat, breathing short and aching. Will waited, gaze unyielding. Walter’s eyes went to where Morgan had moved, now standing with eyebrows furrowed, though Walter wasn’t exactly sure if he was curious or concerned. Maybe both.

Water forced himself up, legs trembling under him. Will was quick, his foot locking around the back of Walter's ankle, pulling Walter's foot easily out from under him and sending him careening into the mat. Walter gasped, air knocked from him for the second time in the last two days, leaving his coughing on the mat. Will didn't help him like Hannibal had. He watched Walter with faint interest as Walter did his best to force the air back into his lungs.

"Again."

"N-No," Walter choked out, inhaling deeply, eyes watering again. "Not today." That was a plea, begging as exhaustion took over his mind, swirling through him and wanted to make him cry, fall apart. The air was hot as he pulled it into his lungs, as if he were at the center of the sun. It was crushing.

Walter felt fuzzy. Dizzy. In this stupid room, in this stupid moment, he felt sick, most likely from the blood flowing down his throat, and not entirely present as if he were watching things from the outside.

"No," Will said, voice harsh.

"Please-"

"Again."

Walter rolled onto his elbows and knees and tried to stand again, but found himself only able to push up to his knees. "Please," he begged, eyes down on the blue of the mat that was slowly turning an odd purple with his still freely flowing blood.

"No. Get up. Again."

It was cruel what he was doing. What was wrong? Was it because Hannibal wasn't here? That didn't make sense. Hannibal was the one who pushed them, not Will. Will was the kinder between the two. Did he feel like he needed to make up for Hannibal not being here? No. Not even Hannibal would have done this to them.

"I can't," Walter whispered, arms shaking as he used them to hold himself up. He was doing his best not to collapse into tired sobs. He couldn't remember having ever been this tired.

Will watched Walter in silence, ground held tightly. This was something Walter needed to learn; it wasn't a lesson that Will could provide him with words. It had to be action.

Walter looked up and met his dad's eyes, seeing himself reflected in the dissatisfaction there. He wiped at his nose once more, sniffling painfully as the bleeding was finally letting up, the mat beneath him slick with it.

"Again," Will said quietly, though it sounded like gunfire in that room.

And then something snapped in Walter. Head jerking upwards, the words left Walter's mouth, sharp, each word biting and angry. "We are done for today," he growled, getting to his feet, the pain in his muscles easily ignored in his anger. He reached for Will who quickly sidestepped the attack. "And I don't care what you want!"

Walter stumbled to a stop and flipped back around, barely ducking in time to miss the punch that was thrown at him. Will had left himself open and Walter quickly took advantage of that, throwing himself at Will's core and knocking him to the mats.

They rolled, each fighting to be on top and Walter eventually found himself on top of Will, knees pinning down Will's arms, hands tight around Will's neck, pushing down and into the mat.

"I'm not doing this anymore and you can't make me," Walter hissed, jaw tight. "I'm done today." It wasn't until Will's face paled and Morgan took a few steps forward that Walter's face softened and he blinked several times, coming back to himself.

He quickly jumped away from Will, staring at his hands that were stained with his own blood and no longer innocent like they had once been before his mother died. Walter kept his eyes strictly on his hands, wincing and anticipating the anger from Will.

Will gasped, rolling onto his side, coughing as air rushed back into his lungs and bloodstream. He looked over Walter, who looked like he was trapped in his head, afraid of the punishment that was going to come.

Will slowly pushed himself up and reached out a hand to Walter, taking one of Walter's hands and calling his son's eyes to him. "Ok," Will said with a scratchy voice, receiving a confused look from the boy. "We're done for today." Will moved closer and wrapped his arms around Walter in a hug, feeling the boy go stiff, anger gone. "You're a good boy. I'm sorry."

"What?"

Will's fingers brushed through Walter's sweat damp hair and he gave a sigh. He wished there were easier ways to teach these things. He had thought all night about it after Hannibal had brought up the conversation that Walter and him had had in the bathroom.

"You learned it," Will replied, doing his best to be a comfort and not an enemy any more.

He didn't like being the bad guy. He didn't like filling the boy's heads with all of this information, but there really wasn't anything else that Will could do to keep them safe. And he and Hannibal had promised Molly, Margot, and Alana to protect their children no matter the costs and Will wasn't about to stop protecting them in the best way that he knew how. And it sucked. It was cruel and unusual and that was why Will fought Hannibal so hard on so many aspects. They still needed some form of normality in their lives among all of the lessons that most weren't taught until much later in life. It was a lot to take on, but Walter could do it and in turn so could Morgan.

"Learned what?" Walter asked dumbly.

"What I was trying to teach you," Will answered, pushing Walter back to look over his blood covered face. "It's not something I can just tell you. You have to learn through experience. You have to see it for yourself. The important things are like that."

"I don't feel like I learned anything," he protested limply.

"Challenge everything," Will said, hands brushing back dark hair from Walter's face as Will gave him a small smile. "You have to challenge everything. Even me. Even your father. If you don't, you will get pushed around. You take what you want. You don't take no for an answer. You fight even if

you can't stand. You fight until you are on top. You give everything you can and then more until you win. Do you understand?"

Walter gave a small nod, comprehension in his dark eyes. He did understand now. He knew exactly what Will meant with a rush of clarity and he knew that everything his parents did had a purpose, a reason. It wasn't to be cruel and unkind. It was meant to teach them something important.

"Good." Will gave a small nod. "You're excused for the day. Go wash up and take some medicine and get some ice for your nose. Eat something, drink at least two water bottles. I will tell your father what happened when he gets home so he's not upset with you." Walter gave another small nod and let Will help him to his tired feet. "I'm proud of you Walter. Good work today."

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With Walter's nose once more fixed and in place, notice given to Hannibal by way of text to a burn phone, Hannibal left the bathroom and entered the kitchen where a tired looking Morgan sat, highlighting in a text book.

"Where's your dad?" Hannibal asked, having not seen Will since he got home.

"His room, I think," Morgan answered, glancing up from his work, eye a deep purple from the scuffle the day before.

"Morgan, get some ice for your eye," Hannibal instructed before leaving the kitchen and heading for the stairs.

Hannibal opened the door to their room, finding the large space empty. The bed, in rich dark blue silks, was perfectly made, the curtains drawn to keep the room dark, nothing out of place. Not a picture crooked, not any clothing left out on the floor, nothing to suggest that anyone was here other than the scent of eucalyptus and spearmint coming from the en suite.

Hannibal stepped into the large bathroom that was beautiful marble with an expensive clawfoot tub in the center, dark curls peaking over the side. Hannibal gave a small smile and stepped in, pulling a stool to the side of the tub, sitting on it. Will's eyes flickered open at the sound and he glanced up at Hannibal, sitting up a little more in the tub.

Hannibal's eyes wandered over his husband's body, taking in the injuries that littered his skin. His hands reached out, taking Will's arm to look over a deep gash there. Carefully searching fingers prodded over Will's skin and Will relaxed into the touch, head leaning back against the side of the tub with eyes closed.

Finally, Hannibal's fingers found the bright and fresh bruises and swelling around Will's throat, delicately tracing the lacing there, making Will shiver.

"Is this why you rebroke our son's nose?" Hannibal asked with a curious glint to his voice.

"No," Will whispered in a ragged voice. "This was a result of rebreaking his nose."

"He's getting better."

Will gave a small smile as Hannibal kissed his cheek. "Much better," Will agreed. "He just needs time." Will chuckled and leaned away from Hannibal at a playful bite at his jaw.

“You’re feeling ok?” Hannibal asked with a bit more concern in his voice, tipping Will’s head back to better look at the handprints left in painted purple in Will’s skin. “You can breathe alright?”

“I’m used to being choked by now Hannibal,” Will reminded smugly with bright eyes, voice still harsh as it always was when Hannibal was done with him. “Your hands always seem to find my throat too.”

“You do look magnificent decorated in collars of injury.” Hannibal released his hold and got to his feet, pulling his suit coat from his shoulders and draping it over the counter. Next came his tie and he rolled up his sleeves to his elbows before moving the stool from Will’s side to behind Will. “And how did Morgan do today?”

“Fine,” Will answered, allowing Hannibal’s hands to dip into the water and rest on his shoulders. Long artistic fingers began to work at the muscles in Will’s back and Will sighed, leaning into the hold. “He’s doing well for his age. He’ll be strong enough soon.”

“I’m sorry I had to leave you today.”

“I understand there are things you need to take care of,” Will assured. He winced at a difficult knot that Hannibal pressed into hard. “Those boy’s parents weren’t going to rest until they sued us for everything we owned.”

“The boys need more discipline. They can’t act out like that.”

“They were defending themselves like we taught them to.”

“They should have deescalated the situation. Not engaged in it,” Hannibal pushed. “What we teach them should be a last resort.”

“Hannibal, you can’t be mad at them. They did exactly what we have taught them to do. They protected each other using whatever they had to. You can’t be mad at them for that.” Will sat up a little bit more and turned to look at Hannibal, whose hands jumped back from Will’s skin. Will’s eyes flickered over Hannibal’s face and he reached up, caressing Hannibal’s cheek with a wet hand, though Hannibal didn’t comment on it. “You’re not mad.”

“I’m not mad,” Hannibal agreed, taking Will’s hand and placing a kiss into its palm. “I’m concerned. I do not want to have to rip the boys away from somewhere they are finally growing comfortable again. We move too often for them to have a sense of normality like you’re wanting them to.”

“You didn’t kill the boy's parents, did you?” Will asked with furrowed brows.

Hannibal shook his head. “Just paid them off and their medical bills. Not that they needed the help.”

Will gave a nod and pulled Hannibal closer, kissing him. With a small smile against Hannibal’s lips, Will took a handful of Hannibal’s collar and yanked, dragging Hannibal into the tub with him.

Water splashed over the sides of the tub noisily and Will laughed as Hannibal came above the surface with a gasp, pushing silver hair from his face. His red eyes were fire as they glared at Will who could only laugh.

“This suit was made in Milan, Italy,” Hannibal stated coldly. “It is a Ermenegildo Zegna original and cost-”

“A lot of money,” Will said with a smile, moving to lean against Hannibal’s soaked suit, head resting to Hannibal’s chest, heart steady despite the upset. Will could feel Hannibal’s body relax and Hannibal gave an irritated sigh through his nose, a hand resting against Will's bareback, caressing his silky soft skin. “It’s just an excuse to go back to Italy,” Will teased, a smile still on his face. “Please take me back to Italy, Hannibal. *Voglio rivedere l'Italia, per favore.*” *(I want to review Italy, please.)*

“Your accent is getting better,” Hannibal whispered, kissing at Will’s curls. “Italy...” Hannibal mused softly. “We go there a lot. Is there anywhere else you’d like to see?”

Will shook his head. “Later. We always have later,” Will stated. “There’s still so many secrets in Italy.” Will sat up, kissing Hannibal, hands on Hannibal’s chest to keep his balance. “You still have to show me Venice. We always go to Rome or Milan or Florence. *Per favore portami a vedere Venezia. Per favore.*” *(Please take me to see Venice. Please.)*

“I’ll think about it.” Will pouted and Hannibal smiled. “You’ve become spoiled.”

“I told you not to buy me things.” Will’s smile returned and his fingers began to work on the buttons of Hannibal’s shirt.

“What about the boys?” Hannibal asked, wet fingers brushing through Will’s hair.

“They always come with us.” Will continued to fuss with the buttons on Hannibal’s ruined shirt.

“Walter could watch Morgan.”

Will paused and looked up at Hannibal with an unsure expression. “I don’t think that-”

“After this weekend,” Hannibal hushed, giving Will a small kiss. “Let’s see how they do. Then we can discuss a trip for just the two of us.”

“To Venice?”

“If that’s where you want to go.”

“Yes,” Will answered with a bright smile.

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Walter stared up at the ceiling that was basked in a bright moonlight. Morgan lay fast asleep, curled into his side. As long as he could remember Morgan had been sleeping in his bed with him. It had started after Morgan’s parents were killed. Normally Walter didn’t mind, but tonight he was sore and being smashed into a small space was not ideal.

He carefully pulled himself free of the younger boy’s grip and maneuvered his way over the top of Morgan until he could leave the room. With a deep breath, Walter wandered down several halls and to the other wing of the house where Will’s and Hannibal’s room was.

Walter hadn’t asked for Hannibal’s help today because Will and Hannibal had been in such a good mood, Walter didn’t want to interrupt it. It always made the house so much nicer when they were

more than their normal kind tempered parents, not that the house wasn't fine the way it was. It was just more relaxed when they were in a good mood.

With a deep breath, now standing in front of their door, he gave a small knock, the sound seeming to bounce and echo down the hall. After the knock disappeared and Walter waited a bit longer, he tried once more. Still no answer.

He bit his lips. He knew the rule. He knew that Will and Hannibal weren't to be disturbed if they were alone in their room without very specific permission. But there was no way Walter was going to be able to sleep if Hannibal didn't work these knots out of his muscles and if he didn't sleep, he was going to be reprimanded for falling asleep during class that he had in the past.

Feeling so very small, Walter pushed the bedroom door open and carefully glanced inside, finding two bodies in their bed, both fast asleep. "Father?" Walter asked, voice barely a whisper. When neither of them stirred, he tried once more, voice a little louder. "Father."

Will jumped up with a sharp inhale, alarmed. Seeing that it was Walter at the door, Will lowered his head into a hand with a groan. Walter could see all of the bruising that lined his body, a sharp contrast to his bare pale ribs and watched as his free hand slid something back under his pillow, though Walter couldn't make out what it was.

Walter watched as Hannibal slowly rose from the bed, grabbing his robe from where it hung on a chair. He pulled it on and tied it around his waist before walking around to Will's side of the bed, speaking just loudly enough for Walter to hear him.

"*Grįžk miegoti, mano meile*." *(Go back to sleep my love.)* An urging for Will to go back to sleep that was said in Lithuanian, though, now that Hannibal had pointed it out, Will never answered back in the language even though Walter knew Will knew how to speak it. Hannibal placed a deep kiss to Will's lips and waited for Will to lie back down on the bed before he turned to Walter, nodding Walter out of the room.

Hannibal shut the door quietly and turned to Walter, silently waiting for an answer as to why they had been woken in the middle of the night, much against house rules. Walter took a deep breath. It's not like Hannibal would yell at him. He never did. His eyes would just hold disappointment in them and somehow that was almost worse.

"I didn't want to bother you earlier about this, but I can't sleep," Walter began and stopped when Hannibal gave an understanding nod.

"What's hurting you?" Hannibal asked softly.

"Other than my nose, my right shoulder blade is hot." Walter reached back to feel at the irritated skin under his shirt. "And my calf feels tight."

"Let's get you back to your room and I'll take care of you," Hannibal assured and Walter wondered if the man was too tired to care if his sleep had been interrupted.

"What does dad keep under his pillow?" Walter asked as Hannibal took his shoulder and led Walter back down the hall and towards his own room. There was a silence, but Walter knew Hannibal wouldn't lie to him. Neither Will nor Hannibal ever lied to him as far as he knew. It was an important rule that Will had established, curious why it was made. Had Hannibal lied to Will about something?

“A gun.”

“Do you keep anything under your pillow?”

“No,” Hannibal replied as they came to stand in front of Walter’s bedroom door. Walter reached out and opened the door, letting them in, but he didn’t turn on the light. When Hannibal entered the room, he could see a small form curled up in Walter’s bed, sleeping soundly. Hannibal looked over Morgan curiously before he went to turn on the lamp on Walter’s desk instead, guiding Walter down into his desk chair. “How often is he in your bed?”

Walter gave a shrug and winced at the protest from his stiff limbs. He pulled his shirt over his head and could feel Hannibal’s eyes look over his back that was scraped and bruised. “He has nightmares,” Walter answered softly. His teeth gritted together as Hannibal’s fingers pressed into the inflamed skin at Walter’s shoulder blade.

“So he comes to you?”

“He has ever since Margot and Alana died.” Walter’s hands took the edge of the desk and he held back a moan of pain as Hannibal dug into the muscle there.

“You’re worse than normal,” Hannibal pointed out, a single hand taking Walter’s shoulder to hold the boy still while he continued to work at the knot with his other hand. “Did something happen today?”

“Dad didn’t let me stop when I asked to rest.”

Hannibal gave a sound of understanding behind Walter, but didn’t say another word and Walter wondered if Will had told Hannibal the full truth about what had happened or not. “I think you strained your muscles,” Hannibal explained. “After this let’s get you some ice. I don’t want you to do the next hand to hand training. You need to rest. If you overexert yourself, you will make it worse.”

“You want me to skip hand to hand?” Walter asked in utter shock. He had never missed a single day of class or training. Not a single moment was put to waste and it was because Walter felt it was his obligation, his job and he had to live up to the pedestal that Morgan was on.

“Do I need to get you a doctor’s note to give to Will?” Hannibal teased, causing Walter to snort with laughter. “You want to build your muscle up slowly, not hurt it. Relax the rest of this week and you will pick up hand to hand on Monday.”

“Ok.” Walter said with a bright smile, shoulder not feeling nearly so agitated now.

“Better?”

“Yes.”

Hannibal released Walter and knelt down beside his chair. “Which leg?” Walter held out his left and Hannibal placed Walter’s foot on his knee, fingers feeling at the muscle in his calf for a moment before massaging into it. “Morgan should stay in his own bed.”

“I don’t mind,” Walter said softly, looking over to where Morgan was still fast asleep, tangled in Walter’s sheets. “And I don’t want him bothering you and dad.”

“Walter,” Hannibal said firmly, calling Walter’s attention from the little boy and to his father. Walter looked over his father’s face but couldn’t exactly place what expression was there. Will always seemed to know what Hannibal was thinking, but Walter was never close when he guessed. The only time he ever knew was if Hannibal let the expression flood his eyes and at the moment, there was a steel locked door that Walter wouldn’t be able to get through. “You are not his parent. That is not your role to play.”

“I really don’t mind, father,” Walter tried again.

“It’s unhealthy for you to take on that responsibility,” Hannibal pushed as he worked at the muscle a little longer. “Will and I are his parents. If he has nightmares, he can come to us.”

“What about the rules?” Walter asked in confusion. They kept all of the rules. Every rule. It had been engraved into Walter like a name on a grave. He had learned early on that when Hannibal said to do something, you did it without question. Each rule was there for a very specific reason and the punishment would be harsh if they were broken, though lately Walter seemed to be skating by and he didn’t understand why.

“Rules are meant to keep you safe and everything stable. I do not expect the rules to be followed if you are hurting or needing help.” Hannibal’s eyes met Walter’s to make sure he was understanding. “You needed help tonight, didn’t you?” Walter gave a small nod. “Then you did nothing wrong other than give Will a heart attack.”

“I didn’t want to-”

“Walter,” Hannibal interrupted gently, placing Walter’s leg back on the ground. “You hold yourself up to impossible standards. You seem to think that everything is set in stone and there is no other route to take than the one your dad and I have set out. That is not true and I need you to understand that.”

“Challenge everything,” Walter muttered, recalling the words that Will had told him earlier that day.

“Quite right.” Hannibal’s hand reached out and gently caressed Walter’s cheek. “You are getting old enough to start making your own choices. You won’t need Will and me for very much longer. Start going out on your own a little. Do not feel afraid of Will and me. I don’t want you to be afraid of us. We are here to help you, not scare you into doing what we want you to do.”

Walter blinked as he tried to take in the words. Words that shattered everything that had been drilled into him for the last two years. Words that went against his very foundation that he had begun building the moment his mother was taken from him and Hannibal was shoved into that parental hole more out of necessity than any kind of want on Walter’s part.

And it stuck Walter odd how easily he had just accepted Hannibal into his life. It had never occurred to him, but the first time he had seen his dad and Hannibal kiss, he had accepted that this was his life now. Maybe it was a survival tactic. Maybe he was frightened. He honestly didn't remember. There had been so much going on all at once that Walter wasn’t even sure how long it took him to fully understand that his mother was dead.

“Are you understanding what I am telling you, *mangustėl*?”

“I don’t want to take lessons with you anymore,” Walter said absently, still mostly lost in trying to find the meanings of those words. “I want to go to a real school. I will train when I come home, after homework.”

“You will have to speak German.”

“Sink or swim,” Walter agreed with a small nod, eyes still distant.

“Your dad has a lot on his mind at the moment,” Hannibal announced, releasing his hold on Walter’s face and rising to his feet. “How about we three discuss this come Monday? I would like a list of reasons why a more public school would be beneficial for you. If we can come to an agreement, you will of course be attending the finest private academy. I won’t have your mind wasted in a public school. They will expect a lot from you, as will I. I will expect your grades not to slip and that you will finish all of your homework in a timely manner and continue your home studies as well. Is that acceptable?”

“Yes,” Walter answered softly.

“And this is susceptible to change based on the conversation.”

“Of course.” Walter gave a sigh and stood. He stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Hannibal in a hug. “Thank you.”

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Morgan glanced up from his book as Walter entered the kitchen, jumping up onto the counter and pulling an apple from the fruit basket. He wiped it on his shirt and then took a bite of it, his back to Morgan.

Morgan frowned, eyes lowering back to his book. “You’re not supposed to sit on the counter,” Morgan reminded, turning the page though he wasn’t much interested in the Italian scroll across the page anymore. He gave a small sigh and looked back up when Walter ignored him, another crunch of the apple sounding. “Wally.”

“I will sit on the counter if I want,” Walter shot back, voice more playful than sharp, though Morgan could read Walter’s voice better than anyone else. He knew when Walter was upset or sad. He knew Walter better than anyone. He only spent nearly every living and breathing moment with him and Walter was annoyed.

“Father-”

“Father’s not here,” Walter pointed out, looking over his shoulder at Morgan while taking another bite of the apple. Morgan’s lips pursed as juice ran down Walter’s chin and he didn’t bother to wipe it away. “You need to lighten up. Come play soccer with me.”

“So that you get beat up again? No thank you,” Morgan muttered, doing his best to focus his attention back on the book that he suddenly couldn’t remember the plot of.

“We can play in the backyard. There’s tons of room.”

“No, thank you,” Morgan replied, the words no longer making much sense to him as he watched Walter finally wipe at the juice on his chin and hop down from the counter.

“All you ever do is read. Don’t you get bored? It’s like school all day long.” Walter moved over and snatched the book away from Morgan, looking over the title. “*Il Principe*. What’s it about?”

“It’s an Italian treatise from the 1300’s. Give it back,” Morgan said, reaching for the book, but Walter easily kept it out of reach.

“*Riguardo a questi due metodi per diventare un principe per abilità o fortuna, desidero addurre due esempi-*” *(Regarding these two methods of becoming a prince by skill or luck, I would like to give two examples-)*

“Wally, give it back.”

Walter took a deep bite, finishing off his apple and tossed the book back to Morgan who caught it against his chest. Walter threw his core away into the trash can and moved back over to Morgan, leaning against the counter.

“Why on earth would you want to read some old essay thing?”

Morgan gave a sigh. “I find it interesting. Is it that hard to believe?”

“A bit,” Walter stated with a smile, showing bits of apple in his teeth as he chewed it. He swallowed and looked over Morgan’s disapproving glare with a new found brightness to his smile. “Come explore with me. We’ve never been to the west wing.”

“There’s nothing in the west wing that’s any different from what’s in the rest of the house.” Morgan lowered himself from the bar stool and dropped to the ground.

“Come on Morgan. Maybe there’s a library. Or maybe it’s father’s study. He would have a lot of fun books in there,” Walter pushed again.

“No, Walter.”

Walter frowned at the use of his full name, not used to it coming from the younger boy’s mouth. “Right,” he grumbled, shoving his hands into his pockets and heading out of the kitchen, barely giving Will enough warning to jump back and let him pass through the doorway.

“Nice to see you too,” Will called after him, hoping for a reaction and getting none, let Walter go, focus coming to Morgan who was clutching the book to his chest. “What are you reading now, Morgan?” Will asked as he went to the fridge to dig through it. “It seems like you have a new book every time I lay eyes on you.”

“*Il Principe*,” Morgan replied softly, eyes still on the open door where Walter had once been. “Why does he hate me?”

Will paused, glancing over his shoulder, the young boy nearly hidden behind the counter. Will gave a sigh and closed the fridge, going for the pantry instead. He fished out a small case of lebkuchen cookies and pulled the pack open, setting it on the counter beside Morgan, who turned around. Will took one and looked over Morgan who stared at him in question.

“You’re not supposed to have sweets before dinner,” Morgan said softly before watching his dad take a bite of the cookie. “If father-”

“Father will not be home until later,” Will pointed out, watching the boy’s eyes drop down to the pack, though he still hesitated. His eyes returned to Will who gave a shrug and Morgan slowly reached out, pulling a cookie from the pack, taking a bite from it. “Our secret, ok?”

Morgan gave a small nod, setting his book up on the counter and climbing back up into the bar stool. “Can I have a glass of milk?”

Will gave a nod, setting his cookie down before fetching two glasses and the brown glass bottle of milk from the fridge. Will poured each of them a glass and passed one to Morgan who drank from it quickly, setting the glass aside with a milk mustache across his lip. Will smiled, but said nothing as Morgan took another bite of the cookie.

“Walter doesn’t hate you,” Will stated strongly, holding out the pack of cookies for Morgan to take another one before he went to put the pack away.

“How do you know?” Morgan questioned, not feeling very in the mood for the cookies anymore. His eyes were trapped on crumbs that scattered the black countertop until Will used a rag to wipe them away, removing any evidence of the broken rule. “I don’t feel like I belong here.”

“What do you mean?” Will asked in confusion. “Just because your brother-”

“But he’s not my brother,” Morgan whispered, wiping at his mouth and pushing his cookie and glass of milk aside. “He says so all of the time. And I know he’s not. I wasn’t that old when...” Morgan trailed off, the picture of his mother pulling him behind her as the gun went off. He could remember the heat of her blood over his face. “I wasn’t that old, but I remember what happened. I know you took me away.”

“It was to protect you. We promised your mom,” Will explained gently. “You understand that, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Morgan answered softly, eyes dropping back to the countertop.

Morgan sighed and rested his head on the counter, eyes full of nothing but the blackness of the countertops as he relived that night just as he did in his nightmares. He could remember the promise. He could remember his mom laying on the ground, a pool of blood around her that was too big to do anything to fix. Morgan understood that now, after all of the medical training that Hannibal put him through daily. Sometimes there was nothing you could do, sometimes the puddles of blood were too big and you just had to know. And he remembered Hannibal ordering Will to take him from the room and to hide both him and Walter, then being shoved into a closet where Walter hugged him until the door opened again and Will stood there.

“Are we a family?”

“Yes,” Will replied soberly, leaning back against the counter, looking over the younger boy. “And Walter is your brother whether he believes it or not. We’ll always be here for you Morgan. Anything you need.”

Morgan nodded against the counter. “Where does father always go after classes?”

“He works.”

“Doing what?” Morgan sat up at that, head tipped sideways in question. “We don’t need the money.”

“I think it relaxes him,” Will answered with a small shrug, grabbing the milk and putting it back into the fridge. “He enjoys having something that’s strictly his. He’s a very private person.”

“But what does he do?” Morgan asked once more.

“Therapy.”

Morgan blinked at the answer. He hadn’t expected it. He knew that Hannibal was a doctor. He could recall when he had come to their house and was fixed up, everyone referred to him as Dr. Lecter, but he had never been certain what kind of doctor he was, nor did he much care to ask. He found it was better to keep his father as shrouded in mystery as what was possible because Morgan knew he wouldn’t like what he found underneath.

Morgan had a fair idea, he wasn’t stupid, but he didn’t want it answered. He never wanted to know the absolute truth because he never wanted to come to face the two men who were kind to him and were raising him as their own and see them as monsters.

And Morgan knew they were all monsters deep down. He recognized the differences between his previous life and this one. And he knew the differences from his private tutors’ lessons back in America and the lessons that Hannibal and Will taught him.

Math was so very different from learning the conversion rates of a ruble to a euro.

P.E. was different from hand to hand and gun training.

Arts and crafts, like spaghetti necklaces for Mother’s Day, were not the same as copying a passport.

Morgan’s eyes met Will’s, the monster nowhere to be found, only the kind blue. The monster was only there when it needed to be. Just as controlled as Hannibal’s was. Just as restless and caged until it was needed.

“Walter doesn’t hate you,” Will said, returning back to the earlier question asked. “I think he just feels like he isn’t good enough.”

“So he is jealous,” Morgan muttered. “I just pay more attention than him. You should see him in class. He’s constantly looking out of the window or drawing instead of listening. If he would listen then maybe-”

Will gave a laugh that startled Morgan into silence. Something happier than he normally sounded. Will ruffled at Morgan’s dark hair, making it stick up. “Don’t be too hard on your brother. He’s just in a difficult time growing up. You start to get restless around his age. You’ll understand when you’re older. Just focus on your studies and you’ll be fine. Don’t worry about Walter.”

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Walter caught the soccer ball as it fell down where he had thrown it above him. His back was pressed into his bed and he stared boredly up at the ceiling while playing pass back with himself. He knew that by now dinner was well underway and he couldn’t bring himself to care to go downstairs to help make it. He knew it would make dinner a little more uncomfortable, but as

Hannibal had said, he had choices and right now his choice was staying in his room where he could be lost with his thoughts.

There was a knock at his door and Walter lowered the ball onto his chest, pulling his earphones from his ears and waiting for the door to open.

“Dinner is ready, Walter,” Will’s voice said from the other side. “Please hurry down.”

Walter sat up curiously. There was something in Will’s voice that he couldn’t quite place. Something sad almost, but that wasn’t the right word. Maybe he was just tired. They were going on a camping trip again tomorrow and Will had been packing all day. Or at least that’s what Hannibal had told them during class when Will didn’t show up for breakfast.

Walter was a bit suspicious about it. Will never missed breakfast. Maybe he was sick. There was one time where Will caught the flu and was in bed for several days. He had come down for breakfast the first day and Hannibal forced him back to bed, canceling morning classes so that he could make sure Will was ok.

Walter sat up and placed the ball on his bed before heading from his bedroom and down the hall for the stairs. He entered the dining room and took his normal seat next to Morgan where his place was set. Will was across from him and was looking pale. Maybe he was sick. And Hannibal was at the head of the table, where he always sat. It was the same every night.

Morgan looked down at the bowl in front of him, the dish only seeming to dig in the fact that Will wasn’t feeling well. It was soup. Black Silkie Chicken broth with red dates, wolfberries, bok choy, ginseng and white fungus. It was something that Hannibal fully believed in needing to be eaten when someone was sick. It was medicinal and good enough for the ancient Chinese, so why wouldn’t it be good enough for them?

It’s flavor was weird when Walter had first been ill and made to eat it, but as time went on, he found that he didn’t mind the flavor. It was most likely the ginseng that Walter hadn’t much cared for because he didn’t like the hint of licorice flavor it added to the broth.

Walter glanced around at the oddly quiet table, but didn’t say anything as Hannibal dipped his spoon into his soup, giving a silent permission for them to join, though Will just stared at his bowl. Walter’s eyes didn’t leave Will as he picked up his own spoon. Will was sick. There wasn’t anything else about it.

His skin was pale and he looked fevered, chilled and tired. He was still in what he wore to bed instead of his normal dress clothes that Hannibal had put Will in once they had left, hardly any plaid or khakis anymore. Only when they went camping.

Hannibal must have made Will stay in bed all day. Would they still be going on their camping trip this weekend? Hannibal wasn’t one to usually tag along in them. It just wasn’t his thing. Walter was sure Hannibal could do anything he needed to to survive in the wild, but he was much more suited for the life of high class luxury.

Walter caught movement and watched as Hannibal reached out, taking one of Will’s hands in his, calling Will’s attention to his face. “*Vous vous sentez toujours malade, beau garçon?*” *(Are you still feeling sick, handsome boy?)*

Walter gave a small nod to himself. Will was sick. Hannibal would speak specifically in other languages to Will when Will was sick. Will said it was because it was comforting to hear the sounds that Hannibal's voice could make, but Walter thought it had more to do with the fact that Hannibal wanted to make sure Will was mentally all there, not about to slip away again.

It had been a long time since Will had a slip in memory, but Walter was more than aware how worried about it Hannibal was. Walter couldn't blame him. It had been like missing half of his dad when Will had come home from the hospital after being found two years ago.

Will gave a small nod in answer, placing a kiss to the back of Hannibal's hand before releasing it and folding his arms over the table. Hannibal reached out and gently caressed Will's cheek, finger trailing down the scar that sat there, still brightly white.

"*Mangez quelque chose, s'il vous plaît, et je vous recoucherai,*" Hannibal instructed before returning to his food, him and Morgan the only ones who had touched their food so far. "*Vous devez vous hydrater.*" (*Eat something, please, and I'll put you back to bed. You need to hydrate.)*

Walter wasn't much interested in dinner anymore. Instead, his focus was on his parents. It was always so interesting to Walter how they treated each other. Will was a god and Hannibal was immortal. Both defied anything human, unable to be categorized. Both just as in love with each other as Walter had ever seen them. He had seen his mother fall out of love many times, but Hannibal and Will only seemed to grow stronger in their relationship. Something that was honestly nice to see. He hated when his mother would stop caring because it would carry over to him in some odd roundabout away that Walter could never exactly name.

"Please eat Walter. Your soup is going to go cold," Hannibal instructed, hand taking Will's again, attention now on the boys.

Walter blinked as he was pulled from his thoughts and looked over to Morgan who was nearly done with his bowl. He glanced back up to see Will obey Hannibal's pleas for him to get something into his system before going back to bed, eating some of the soup.

Walter glanced down at his frozen hand that had a spoon halfway dipped into the soup and finished the motion, scooping up some of the broth. He placed it into his mouth and did his best to keep his face from showing any sort of emotion. It was wrong. The flavor profile was wrong. Salty. Far too salty. And Hannibal wouldn't over season something. Never once had Hannibal ever over seasoned anything. Everything was always absolutely perfect because he couldn't stand it to be anything less than perfect.

Walter's eyes met Hannibal's, who was watching him, and he inhaled through his nose, taking his napkin from beside his bowl and raising it to his mouth. His eyes stayed locked with Hannibal's as he spit the broth from his mouth into the cloth napkin. The knowing in Hannibal's gaze sent a shiver through Walter's body.

Walter cleared his throat and set the napkin down on the table. "Father?" he asked, voice steady, mind racing. Salty. What left a salty taste? What was making Morgan look like he was falling asleep beside him? "Do we have any leftovers from last night?"

"Is there something wrong with the food?" Hannibal questioned, setting his own things down and sitting up a little straighter.

“I’m just not in the mood for soup tonight. Was there anything left over from last night?” Walter tried again, keeping his voice as respectful as possible and pretending not to notice Morgan’s slumping body.

“I will make you a plate,” Hannibal said lightly, placing his own napkin from his lap onto the dark wooden table top and rose to his feet. He placed a kiss to Will’s head as he passed and left the room.

Walter’s eyes moved over to his dad, taking in Will’s complexion again. He was having a panic attack, he wasn’t sick, but it would make him sick. He was worried about something, though Walter still couldn’t exactly place the reason that everything was going the way it was. But if Will had been suffering from it all day, enough to make it so he couldn’t leave his bed, then there was something wrong.

“Gamma-butyrolactone?” Walter asked into the room, watching very carefully the way that Will froze. His mouth eventually tipped into a frown. “The soup was salty.”

“Gamma-hydroxybutyrate,” Will replied in a barely audible voice. “Walter, I-I-”

“You don’t have to explain,” Walter said, getting to his feet and moving over to check on Morgan. He placed a hand beside Morgan’s nose and at breath, Walter’s fingers pressed into Morgan’s neck to check his pulse. “I don’t want to know.” His eyes went to his watch as he counted.

Walter’s heart came to an abrupt stop as a strong hand snatched at his shoulder and pulled him away from Morgan. There was a pain in his neck and he tried to reach back at the person who held him, but he couldn’t pull from the hand that kept him firmly in place.

Walter could see Will’s face swim in his vision, an expression of regret and pain. The needle was pulled from his neck and Walter’s watery feeling legs were moving until he was back in his chair at the table, the room spinning and suddenly inordinately bright. He blinked through the light and could feel something grip at his face, or maybe it wasn’t his face. He wasn’t quite sure anymore if he even had a face.

But there were maroon eyes in front of him and words vibrating through him from a strong accent that he knew. He shook his head at the garbled mess, trying to make sense of it and it was the last thing he could place before his hearing went away like his vision.

“*Atsiprašau, mangustėl. Suprasite pabudę.*” *(Sorry mongoose. You will understand when you wake up.)*

# Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

"You still look a little out of it. Are you going to be alright?"

"Fine," Will replied with a nod. "Been a while since we've done something like this."

Hannibal gave a nod and a smile. "Indecent."

"Erotic."

"Later, love." Hannibal placed another kiss to Will's lips and gave a deep breath. "We have other things to worry about at the moment."

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry about the long wait for an update. My friend fell down the stairs and broke her leg and had to have a surgery and then my other friend has a final paper for his last semester of college and we've all been trying to pitch in to help write it. it has been one hell of a few weeks. Not to mention this holiday is gonna be a mess. First holiday with my parents being divorced and I'm not sure how that's gonna work out. But here is the chapter. Much love to all of you. Thank you for your continued support.

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Will glanced over the two boys they had left huddled under a tree with their pack, in clothes not nearly warm enough for the summer nights. Not that it would drop horribly. Germany stayed decently warm during the summer, but shorts and a t-shirt were not warm enough for what would most likely be fifty degrees or lower.

The sun was mostly down now and darkness was shadowing the boys' faces. Will pushed Morgan's hair out of his face and felt Hannibal's hand clasp his shoulder.

"Come along, Will. They'll be waking up in a few minutes," he stated, giving Will's shoulder a squeeze.

Will rose back to his feet and let Hannibal lead him numbly away and back to the car. Will climbed in and went through the motions of putting on his seat belt with a frown before lowering his head into his hands as Hannibal started the car.

"Will, do I need to get you something to calm you down when we get home? You can't stay sick like this," Hannibal muttered. , voice gentle, knowing better than to push Will at the moment.

"Go back," Will whispered, guilt swarming him. It had been eating him up all day. He had been throwing up, desperately trying to rationalize a way out of it, but couldn't. He knew better. He knew so much better, but it hurt. Hurting his children hurt him in turn. He didn't like the idea of them suffering. It made him want to hold onto them and never let them out of his sight so that he could always protect them. "Please go back."

"Will," Hannibal said sternly. "We've already discussed this. You know-"

"I know it's important. I know it needs to happen. I know that we have tracking systems in the bag, but that doesn't stop how worried I am." Will sat up fully, looking over his husband whose face was painfully blank.

"You're empathizing too much, *mylimasis*," Hannibal warned, a hand reaching out and trying to take Will's. Will pulled his hand away and Hannibal glanced over to see a tear roll down one of Will's cheeks. "They are going to be just fine."

Will shook his head. "Do you know what they are going to think about us? Especially Walter?"

"We left them a note. They will understand. They're smart boys," Hannibal insisted. "And this will tell us where they are. They have never had a chance to put what they've learned into action."

"You're not worried?"

"I didn't say that," Hannibal corrected, turning on the headlights to make sure he didn't run into any of the trees that were becoming thick dark pillars in the darkening sky. "We've put precautions up to protect them. We have tracking devices, we gave them all the necessary supplies, they are on our own private property that we have scouted out ourselves to make sure that everything is safe for them. Everything we do, we do for them, for their benefit. This is no different."

"Do you know what I thought the first time that my father didn't come home because he was black out drunk?" Will asked, glancing over to Hannibal who was silent in waiting for Will to continue. "It broke me. Tore me in half because I was forgotten. What I feared was true, that my father never really ever had cared for me and I was just baggage and maybe this time he had decided not to take me with him when he left. My brain felt electrocuted, so violently defocused. The emotional pain was so all encompassing I simply existed as a matter of will power. I had to. I didn't want to. I don't want them feeling that. I don't want them to feel betrayed and forgotten or pushed aside or-or abandoned."

Will wiped at his cheeks as more angry and hot tears fell. Hannibal once more tried to reach for Will's hand, but Will shifted further against the car door.

"Don't touch me," he whispered. "Not right now."

"*Žinoma, mylimas*." *(Of course, beloved.)*

The rest of the drive back was painfully quiet and once back at the house, Will didn't wait for Hannibal to open his car door like he normally did. He let himself out and went for the front door, trying to open it and stopping when it was locked. With a deep sigh he waited for Hannibal to unlock the door and push it open for him before stepping inside the large entry way.

Will immediately went for the music room and sat down at the piano, opening the lid and playing the first thing that came to his mind. Something soft and gentle, something he hoped would calm him. Hannibal slowly followed and went for the bar, pouring out two fingers of whiskey for Will and took it to the piano, setting it beside Will.

"That's pretty," he announced before going over to where he kept several different bottles of medication in the bar. Medication that he didn't want the children getting into. They never went near the bar, so it was a safe bet to hide anything in there. It was where they would hide the Christmas and birthday presents as well. "I haven't heard that one before."

"Been working on it during the day," Will muttered, pausing and taking a sniff of his whiskey before tentatively sipping at it. Finding nothing amiss in smell or flavor, he downed the glass. "You still haven't taught me the rest of Claire de Lune." Will placed the glass aside and went back to the hauntingly sad tune.

"You can read sheet music now, *mylimas*," Hannibal pointed out, returning to the piano with the medicine and the bottle of whiskey. He filled Will's glass once more and placed the small white pill beside the glass. "I didn't think I would have to teach you anymore."

"I want you to teach me." Will's paused once more and he looked over the white pill, not touching it. "What is it Hannibal?"

"Just alprazolam," Hannibal replied, returning to the bar to pour himself a glass of wine. "But I would be careful taking it with alcohol. That could strengthen the effect."

"And if I don't know what alprazolam is?" Will muttered, finally reaching out and picking up the pill to inspect it. It looked innocent enough, but he knew Hannibal too well. Had been drugged enough times to know not to trust anything Hannibal put in front of him. Of course, the drugging wasn't bad. It was usually rather pleasant and he enjoyed what happened while he was drugged, what he could remember of it anyways. But at this moment Will wasn't going to leave it up to chance.

"Xanax." Hannibal stepped over to the piano and took a seat beside Will on the bench, taking a sip of his wine. Will looked over the pill suspiciously and, finally deciding to trust it, Will downed it with a swig of whiskey, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Would you like me to teach you now?"

Will shook his head. "I don't think I could store it in memory if you tried to teach me now. And once this kicks in, who knows what I'll remember." Will sighed, shaking out his curls before playing once more. "It's been a long time since you've played for me."

"Would you like me to?"

Will frowned. "The only thing I want right now are my sons back and safe in their beds and you know it."

"*Tylus, mylima. Jie netrukus grįš*," *(Be quiet, my love. They will be back soon.)* Hannibal hushed, placing a kiss to Will's temple, grateful when he didn't pull away. "I promise they were return safe and sound. Have faith in them."

"I-I do," Will stuttered out, hands up in frustration. "I have absolute faith in them, it's us that I have my doubts."

"Us?" Hannibal asked curiously.

"What if we weren't enough for them? What if we failed them and they are going to suffer because of it and..." Will trailed off a hand going to his head.

"I warned you not to take it with the alcohol," Hannibal muttered, setting aside his wine. He reached out and took Will's face in his hands, looking over a much calmer Will. The stress lines across his face were smoothed, tears gone, fight diminished. "Are you feeling better?"

"Xanax?" Will asked softly, eyes flickering around Hannibal's face.

Hannibal gave a single nod. "Alcohol can compound the effects. Would you like to go to bed? You will probably start to feel tired soon."

Will gave a small shake of his head. "I didn't think it would kick in this fast. I'm fine. It's an odd feeling when I know I shouldn't be calm and yet I can't feel anything else."

"I'm going to make sure this stays in your system until the boys get back."

"Or we go get them," Will reminded.

"They'll come back," Hannibal assured, brushing beautifully brown curls from Will's face. "But I know you." Hannibal leaned over and placed a kiss to Will's lips, not at all surprised when Will didn't react much to the gesture. "You will go and try to help them. Especially since I have several appointments to keep tomorrow. That is not the goal of this. Are you understanding why I'm going to keep you medicated?"

"Yes, Hannibal."

"Are you ok with that?" Hannibal asked softly, with a small half smile. He always asked permission before giving anything to Will. He waited for a yes, even if it was an unconscious yes, before doing anything. He didn't want this to be against the boy's will. Will had every right to tell him to stop and Hannibal would.

Will pulled from Hannibal's grip and rose from the piano bench, hand taking the piano for balance on weak legs. He moved over to one of the couches in the room, something of a lovely floral pattern that was more for decoration than use, not at all comfortable, but Will found himself not caring. Not caring about anything. Just numbly there in a chemical serenity.

Hannibal followed after him and sat down beside the empath, taking his face. "*Pažvelk į mane, mano meile*," he instructed softly. "*Man reikia, kad pažiūrėtum į mane ir pasakytum, ar viskas gerai.*" *(Look at me my love. I need you to look at me and tell me if everything is okay.)*

"It's fine, Hannibal," Will replied with a small nod. "You promise just this weekend. I don't like this feeling."

"I promise, silly boy."

"Will you play for me Hannibal?" Will's eyes were distant with a pleasant drowsiness in their blue.

"Of course, beautiful boy."

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Morgan's eyes opened to find darkness around him. He shivered and pulled his legs in against his body, trying to find some form of warmth. The world around him was oddly quiet and far too still for his liking, but he couldn't push through the fog in his mind quite enough to fully process why that was. All he knew was that he was freezing and not in his home.

He inhaled deeply, doing his best to will himself through the fog, trying to recall the last thing he remembered. It was blurred. He remembered dinner clearly. Then being carried. The sounds and movements of being in a car and then maybe a sunset. Blinding oranges and pinks.

He sat up and did his best to look around in the darkness, only finding the moon for light. The chill was unreal, making his teeth chatter. Trees surrounded him in every direction, dark and tall, nearly blocking out what little moon light there was. In the silence of the night, Morgan could just make out the chirp of crickets, though faint due to the cold. Wind blew through the trees making the branches creak. Morgan glanced around once more and spotted a body beside his.

"Wally," Morgan said softly as if it would disturb the stillness of the night, shaking the older boy. "Walter, wake up."

When the boy didn't move, a slight panic began to set in. Something was wrong. Waking up in the middle of a forest was wrong, but Walter not waking was worse. Morgan was well aware that Walter was a light sleeper. He would wake up the moment Morgan touched the door handle to Walter's room.

"Walter," Morgan tried again, shaking Walter once more.

Walter sat, leaned against the tree, still and pale in the moonlight like he were a porcelain doll. Morgan's hand went to Walter's mouth and nose and he sighed when he could feel Walter breathing. He was alive. That was a good place to start.

Maybe they had been drugged. The jagged memories were enough to give Morgan the idea. Maybe Walter's just hadn't worn off yet. Morgan just had to wait for Walter to wake up. Maybe Walter would have a better idea of what had happened to them. Maybe Walter would know what to do, because at the moment Morgan was at a loss. The only thing that Morgan could think clearly about was how cold he was and how grateful he was that Walter was there to help him because he wasn't sure what else to do. So Morgan sat there, knees pulled into his chest, hugging himself and shivering. The silence set in, time passing by slowly.

"M-Morgan?" Walter whispered into the darkness, causing Morgan to jump and turn to look at Walter, whose eyes were barely open. "Are you alright?" His voice was scratchy from disuse and he looked like he wanted to go back to sleep.

"I'm fine," Morgan replied through chattering teeth. "You?"

"Cold."

Walter gave a small nod and forced himself to sit up, looking around with a small groan, a hand going to his head. "It's not an ideal situation, but let's get a fire going and we'll wait out the night. See where we are in the morning."

"Start a fire with what?" Morgan asked softly.

Walter glanced around and eyes fell onto a backpack that was near them. He pulled it to him and ripped it open to dig through it. A single bottle of water, a map and compass, a handful of matches and a single solar blanket. At the bottom of the bag Walter also found a handwritten note that he could just barely see in the moonlight.

It was in his father's scroll, letters written in a form that no one used anymore, explaining everything. With a deep breath, Walter crumpled the note and passed it to Morgan, knowing exactly what he had to do.

"We'll use that to get the fire going. Clear a space. I'll gather up something to use. It'll be difficult. Everything is still pretty green, but I'll keep you warm." Walter got to his feet, stumbling into a nearby tree as his legs tried to carry him. "It's a test Morgan. Just a camping trip with the two of us. Nothing to be worried about," Walter assured, pushing himself upright. "I'll get you back home Morgan. Back into our bed soon."

Morgan did as Walter asked and bushed at the brush until there was a patch of dirt and then tried to find dried sticks around himself. He could hear tree branches snapping in the distance and then footsteps as Walter came back with an armful of tree bows with their green pine needles still on them. Walter dropped them on the ground and then knelt down next to Morgan and placed the note in the middle of the patch of dirt, helping Morgan set up the small pile of sticks that he had gathered.

Walter took a match and struck it, a brightness coming from the tip as a single flame burst forth. He covered it from the wind with his hand and stuck it into the paper, lighting a corner of the note and then moved it to another part of the note, that lighting as well. The brightness grew and Walter did his best to grab brown pine needles from the forest floor and keep the small flame alight.

"Morgan, we need more to keep the fire going. Can you please find more wood?" Walter asked, satisfied with the small start of a fire they had.

Morgan gave a nod and got to his feet, looking for what Walter had asked. Walter went back to the tree branches he had grabbed and brought them closer to the fire, setting them down on the ground in a line. He added more small sticks to the fire and then went to another nearby tree, pulling at the branches until they snapped free from the tree.

"How's it going Morgan?" Walter called, a new armful of bows now being laid over the other ones. Morgan came back with an armful of what looked dry enough sticks. "You up for getting some more?" Walter asked as he put some of those on the now fairly alive fire.

"Ok," Morgan whispered dully.

Walter gave him a smile, but Morgan didn't seem to notice it or he didn't acknowledge it, just went back out into the trees in search of more firewood. Walter sighed, his smile falling. He reached out for the space blanket and ripped opening the packaging, throwing it onto the fire as well. He unfolded the silvery blanket and laid it over the tree branches he had gathered.

When Morgan wandered back with another armload, Walter took his hand and led the younger boy to the makeshift bed. He had Morgan lay on the blanket and then folded half of it over the top of Morgan.

"It's not the best, but is it soft enough?" Walter asked, brushing Morgan's hair from his face. Morgan gave a small nod and Walter went back to work. He pulled more branched from the trees, sap covering his hands and twigs pricking at his palms, but he didn't care. He placed the new branches over Morgan's body and then went in search of more. Once the second batch was over Morgan, Walter was about to go out and look for more firewood when a hand took his ankle. "Morgan?" Walter dropped to his knees and gave Morgan a concerned look as Morgan pulled his hand back into the makeshift bed. "What is it?"

"Did dad and father do this to us?"

Walter frowned with a small sigh. Morgan was smart, very smart and he could hide his emotions well, but Walter knew that when it came down to it Morgan felt more than Walter ever could. He locked them all away until he couldn't contain them anymore and then they all came spilling out like a fountain.

"It's not like that Morgan," Walter explained softly, leaning over to add a bit more wood to the fire. "Are you warm?" Morgan gave a nod and Walter smiled, ignoring the chill on his skin. "Get some sleep."

"What is it like then?" Morgan asked when Walter tried to go back to work.

"It's just another lesson. They want to know how we do without them," Walter explained gently. "They'll come find us if we can't find our way back. You don't have to worry. I'm here to protect you."

"Like a big brother?"

A bitter taste filled Walter's mouth at the question. "We're not brothers Morgan." Nothing would ever make Morgan his brother. He wasn't even sure what made Hannibal his father, but he wasn't about to get attached to someone else and have them torn away the way his mother was and the way his new parents very well could be at any given second. "But we can be best friends." It was a simple offer. Something more than he had thought to give Morgan, but that's what they were. Friends. And that was as close as Walter was going to let him get. "Is that alright Morgan?"

"Friends," he agreed with a small nod. "We can be friends."

"Good. Go to sleep Morgan. I'll keep the fire going."

Walter went off and found a few more large armfuls of sticks and then sat beside Morgan who had fallen asleep. Walter pulled the map to him and opened it up, setting the compass on it and trying to figure out exactly where they were. His eyes squinted in the firelight and he added more wood to the fire in order to see a bit better and to help keep the cold from his body.

He located the street that they lived on, the German name odd and long, but recognizable enough. Then their house. They were on their property. Will wouldn't let Hannibal take them anywhere else. They still had to be in a controlled environment. It honestly wouldn't surprise Walter if they had cameras up and were watching their every move.

He glanced up at the moon and sighed, a tiredness in his body. He looked over the compass and turned it around until north lined up correctly, then looked back at the map. Their house was to the west. They would have the sun on their backs most of the day. It would be warm, but not horribly hot. Not like back in Wolftrap.

They would also need to find water. He would make Morgan drink what was in the bottle. Morgan needed to stay hydrated. Walter knew that there was a creek somewhere on their property, if he listened closely enough he could hear it just barely babbling. He had never found the creek before though and it wasn't listed on the map. But the lake that they fished at had to be fed somehow.

And maybe that was how he needed to find where they were. Instead of just walking through random trees and getting lost, maybe they needed to follow the creek to the lake. Walter knew how to get home from there. And he could get water. Running water was better than stagnant water and if he could start another fire he could try to use the plastic bottle as a container to boil the water,

though he wasn't sure if the plastic would hold up. He had to try though. They needed water. Food was another matter. They didn't need food, but it would make it difficult to find the strength to keep going. The sun would take all of that away from them if they weren't careful.

Maybe the lake wasn't such a great idea after all. It could add far more time onto their trek back. Maybe he could find tire tracks somewhere near here and they could follow those. If they were far enough away that this was going to be a day or two trip like the note had said, then they would have been brought here in a car.

And this was private property. There wouldn't be any other cars here. The front of their property had a giant iron fence all the way around it and the back of their property was a sheer cliff face as far as Walter had been told. He had never found the edge of their property, it being acres large, but maybe he needed to familiarize himself with every inch of their property. That was the first lesson he needed to take from this. Know your surroundings intimately.

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"You do not have to take this," Hannibal said as he placed another small white pill beside Will's plate at breakfast. "But I would prefer if you did."

"What meetings do you have today?" Will asked, trying to speak about anything to get his mind off the incredibly empty dining room table.

"I'm meeting with that Schneider girl later this afternoon," Hannibal said as he sat in his own chair, cutting into the sausage link on his plate with polite precision.

"The one who was sexually assaulted?" Will asked, eyes not leaving the white pill that looked back at him threateningly. Hannibal normally took the confidentiality between him and his patients seriously, and Will respected that. He wouldn't want one of his sessions with Hannibal being known by others, but this patient had upset Hannibal so badly that Hannibal had been in a bad mood for several days and Will couldn't take it anymore. Will had been able to guess most of the details without Hannibal's help, so Hannibal didn't feel quite so bad at sharing. Hannibal gave a small nod in answer. "That one bothers you. I can tell. You let it get to you"

"In the same way that Margot's brother bothered me," Hannibal agreed before taking a bite.

Will gave a deep sigh, picked up the pill and placed it in his mouth. His mind seemed to be fighting his body. His body was trying to obey swallowing while his mind was screaming that it didn't want to be calm anymore and Will choked on the pill, snatching as his glass of water to try to keep it down.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asked worriedly, getting from his chair. Will coughed, a hand up to stop Hannibal who reluctantly sat back down. Will gulped down the rest of his water while Hannibal watched, eyes not leaving Will for a moment. "Will?"

"Fine," he answered, voice raw. He coughed again, a hand over his mouth. "When you say bothered..." Will trailed off with another fit of coughing, eyes watering.

Hannibal got to his feet and grabbed the pitcher of juice, pouring Will a glass. Will grabbed at the glass and took a drink. Hannibal sat back down and went back to his meal. "He was taken care of."

"Like Mason Verger?"

"Like Mason Verger," Hannibal admitted with a nod.

"And who did it?"

"Her father."

"How old is the girl?"

"Thirteen."

Will's stomach twisted into knots. He didn't feel quite so horrible about her father having been killed by Hannibal. If he was honest, Hannibal's murders hardly ever bothered Will anymore. He knew that the murders came with the man that he had chosen to love and Will's moral compass had been shattered long ago. Sometimes it did find true north, but more often than naught that north was Hannibal.

What hurt him was the idea of someone the same age as Walter having something that horrible happen to them. They were still babies. Children that didn't know any better. It was cruel to show them that side of the world. Hannibal had done the right thing in removing that monster from the girl's life and Will would defend Hannibal against God himself if God so much as thought to judge Hannibal in the justice he had served.

"I am going to be late," Hannibal announced, rising from the table. "I want you back in bed before that pill kicks in, beautiful boy." Hannibal moved over to Will and hugged Will's head to his chest, feeling Will's arms wrap around his waist and hold him tightly. "I will clear all of this up when I get home."

"When will that be? I don't want to be alone," Will whispered, nuzzling his face further into Hannibal's chest. "Can't you cancel your appointments today? Please?"

Hannibal sighed. He would if he had time to give more notice to his patients, but some of them drove a long way to reach him and it wasn't fair for them. "That would be rude, Will." Will gave a small nod in understanding and Hannibal caressed his soft curls. "I will be home before you know it," he assured. "No later than five."

"You promise?"

"I promise, silly boy." Hannibal placed a kiss into Will's curls and gave a sigh. "Let me get you into bed so I know you're safe."

Hannibal helped Will to his feet and guided Will, with a hand to the small of Will's back, up the stairs and to their room. Will went around to the other side of the bed and Hannibal gave a small smile as Will hugged at Hannibal's pillow, sinking into Hannibal's side of the bed. Hannibal leaned over and kissed Will delicately, hands on either side of Will and in the mattress to hold himself upright. There was a sharp tug on Hannibal's neck tie and he fell onto the bed, Will quickly pinning him down, knees on either side of Hannibal's hips.

"I still hate your ties," Will muttered, kissing Hannibal again, hand knotting into the tie, pulling it taut. "Stay with me. Take off this stupid tie and hold me like you did on our wedding night."

Hannibal shivered at the words, thinking back to that night that felt so very long ago. A night fueled by adrenaline and blood. A night where they were hidden away from police sirens and blue

and red lights that painted the rest of the city. A night where they were each other's protection and warmth the whole night, not afraid of anything. For a few hours they were invincible. Nothing could stop them. And nothing did. Not that night.

"I need my address book from my study," Hannibal said softly. "You spoiled boy."

"Shh..." Wil hushed, dragging up on Hannibal's tie until Hannibal met his lips. "You spoiled me. You never tell me no."

"How could I tell you no?"

Will kissed Hannibal again, hand still wrapped in ugly paisley. "You'll stay with me then?"

"Until my afternoon appointment," Hannibal agreed. "The Schneider girl is rather important."

"Don't be gone too long Hannibal," Will warned as he rolled off of Hannibal, snatching back up Hannibal's pillow and hiding his face in it to breathe in Hannibal's scent. Still ever a damp forest and old books. Wine and life. "I don't want to be alone."

"Never again, darling boy."

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The morning was cold and wet. Walter had kept the fire going, but that didn't stop his body from shivering as the morning dew collected on his skin. Morgan had slept the whole night much to Walter's surprise. He was certain he would be helping Morgan deal with new nightmares, but nothing of the sort had occurred.

Walter put some more wood on the fire, having gone off to collect more during the night, and then got to his feet. He checked over Morgan carefully, making sure the kid was alright before heading off with the backpack in hand in the direction of what he thought might have been berry bushes, but it was far too dark to see.

Eventually he found the berry bush again. There were plenty of blackberries for him to gather. He knew Morgan didn't care much for blackberries, but it was better than an empty stomach. Morgan would just have to eat them.

Walter picked a fairly large amount that was in reach, stopping when he tried to reach further into the bush and ended up getting a thorn in his thumb. He used his teeth to pull it out, a brilliant pain now pulsing through his finger as he wandered his way back over to Morgan, who was still sound asleep. Walter set the backpack down and grabbed a small handful, popping one into his mouth and adding a few more sticks to the barely surviving fire, helping the flames start back up again.

His eyes returned to the map that was no easier to see in the morning sunlight, a partly burned stick being used as a pencil to mark the direction that Walter was nearly certain they needed to follow.

There was a rustling of branches and thin plastic and Walter looked over to where Morgan was finally starting to sit up. Walter put another berry in his mouth and motioned to the backpack. "Eat," he instructed. "And don't complain. It's what I could find." Walter swallowed and pointed over to the still unopened water bottle. "Drink some water, but make sure you save it. I don't know if we're going to be able to find any more water."

"Are we that far away from the house?" Morgan asked with a yawn as he came to sit beside Walter and the fire. He pulled out a small handful of blackberries and said nothing as he ate them, though Walter could make out the dislike on the younger boy's face.

"We might be able to reach it by nightfall if we get moving. But I don't want to push you too hard. Again, I don't know if we'll find more water and that's far more important than berries. Though, it would be smart to pick some more before we leave." Walter closed his eyes with a yawn, a tiredness deep set in his bones that he pushed away. "We need something to eat later and we can drink the juice from them if we run out of water."

Morgan was quiet and glanced around them at the now not as terrifying trees. Sunlight was pouring through the trees, not nearly warm enough yet, but he knew it would get warmer as the day went on.

"Is there anything I can do to help? I'm sorry I wasn't much help last night," Morgan muttered, glancing down at his stained fingers.

"Eat more, Morgan. You need your strength up. We have a lot of walking we need to do." Walter rustled at Morgan's hair before grabbing another handful of berries. He pulled the map to him and leaned closer to Morgan so the boy could see. "I'm thinking we're somewhere around here." He pointed to a grouping of trees. "You can hear the stream, so we're not that far off."

"So we have to go that way," Morgan muttered, pointing to the right of them.

"Yep," Walter said with a nod. "As soon as you're ready." There was a small silence as the two continued on in their breakfast, letting the fire slowly die down. "Were you warm enough last night?"

"Very. Thank you." Morgan gave a small nod. "How did you remember how to do that?"

Walter gave a shrug. "The same way you seem to be able to remember German. It just sticks naturally I guess. Nothing to worry about. You ready?" Morgan gave a small nod in answer and Walter got to his feet. "Let's use the blanket to hold more berries. We don't really have anything else. We'll put everything away and get going." Walter stomped out the rest of the fire and kicked some dirt into it. "Drink some of that water Morgan."

"What about you?"

"I'm fine," Walter assured Morgan with a smile. "Let's get going. I think sleeping in a bed tonight sounds better than the ground, doesn't it?"

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"Do you have to go?" Will asked softly into the dark room, his side suddenly very cold at the loss of Hannibal.

"I cannot miss this appointment, Will," Hannibal replied as he pulled on a new suit that wasn't wrinkled and in need of dry cleaning. "She needs the support."

"And you'll be home after?" Will asked, staring blankly up at the ceiling, the calmness pulling him back down into sleep.

"As soon as her session is over I will be home. I promise," Hannibal assured, checking himself over in the mirror before grabbing his tie. "I'll be gone three hours tops."

Will forced his eyes to stay open so he could enjoy the pleasant burn in his limbs a little longer. "Don't fuck me while I'm on Xanax again," Will mumbled, with a small smile.

"You didn't enjoy yourself?" Hannibal asked with his own smile, turning to look over his empath who looked happily content, washed, dressed and back in blue silk sheets.

"I always enjoy myself when I'm with you," Will clarified. "I just like to feel my senses heightened, not dulled. There's always a rush when I'm with you that I like to fully enjoy."

"A rush?" Hannibal asked curiously, stepping closer to the bed and taking a seat on the edge. He reached out and took Will's hand, thumb caressing Will's skin softly.

"Even after all these times, the idea of you being so close to me is terrifying," Will explained, head tipping over tiredly to better see Hannibal who was listening with a look of interest on his face. "Those hands," Will continued on, pulling Hannibal's hand to his mouth and kissing it. "They're so strong and have done so many things to so many people." Will bit at Hannibal's hand and received a chuckle from the older man. "I just imagine what they could do to me."

"I could never kill you Will. Not now," Hannibal said gently. "You're all I've ever wanted. I'm not going to lose that."

"And you've already eaten me," Will reminded him. Hannibal gave a small laugh.

"Yes. I have," Hannibal agreed, letting Will continue to kiss at his hand.

"Is it hauntingly erotic to dine on your own liver with your husband on your anniversary."

"I'm still quite impressed you stayed awake during the operation," Hannibal said, standing from the bed, knowing time wasn't on his side any longer.

"Just because I love you doesn't mean I trust you Hannibal." Will gave a small laugh, letting Hannibal pull his hand free. "Not when I'm cut open on a table and you're digging around my insides."

Hannibal gave a nod. "I do not expect anything less." Hannibal leaned over the bed and gave Will a kiss. "I love you."

"I love you too, Hannibal," Will said softly, eyes fluttering closed.

"Sleep, *mylimas*. I will be back when you wake."

Hannibal placed one more kiss to Will's still swollen lips and left the room. He went through the empty house, one that was far too quiet for a Saturday. When Hannibal was home on Saturdays, the day usually consisted of breaking up petty fights between the two boys whose interests were so polar opposite that there was no way they wouldn't fight.

He could see Walter stealing one of Morgan's books and holding it far above Morgan's head until the boy agreed to play football with Walter. Or maybe video games, though those were usually few and far between, both boys knowing Hannibal didn't much approve of them. Or of TV in general.

But they would be home soon, back to fighting soon, house once more busy with children again soon.

Hannibal left the house and went to his car. His office wasn't far away. Just the next town over. Enough of a distance to keep home and work separate.

When he arrived at the brick building, he could see the young girl's car outside, both her grandmother, who had taken the girl in, and the girl waiting patiently. He got from his car and unlocked the door to his office, holding it open and waiting for the girl.

She was a plain and pretty little thing. Dark hair, brilliant blue eyes, freckles across her cheeks and nose. All in all, she reminded Hannibal of Abigail Hobbs and that was why she was so important to Hannibal.

Abigail had been his and Will's for a time. For a fraction of a broken tea cup, they were a family and it still cut Hannibal deeply to think he had left himself full heartedly believing that they could have been a family.

And he supposed that he had one now. A very mismatched, thrown together family that he really did care deeply for. A family he would do anything to protect, not just for promises' sake.

"Good morning," Hannibal said kindly in German, closing the door behind them. He motioned her from the waiting room and into his office where the girl went and took a seat in her normal chair, pulling her hair over one shoulder and braiding it nervously before unbraiding it. Hannibal looked over the girl for a moment before taking his own seat, unbuttoning his suit coat as he sat. His legs crossed and his hands folded in his lap with a sigh. "You look uncomfortable. What's wrong, Heidi?"

"I'm pregnant."

Hannibal was silent, blinking several times at the abrupt admission. Normally the girl was quiet. Utterly silent until Hannibal promoted an answer from her and then it was like pulling teeth to get anything solid to work with, but she was young, traumatized and Hannibal couldn't be too harsh. He had to carefully pick apart this girl, and it was enjoyable most days.

"I'm assuming that you haven't informed your family," Hannibal said softly, index finger tapping on his knuckles, a slight anger filling his blood. Even if he had removed the predator from her life, he still had his grasp on her and Hannibal wasn't sure exactly what to do to help.

Heidi shook her head, hands still nervously fussing with her hair, braiding it and unbraiding it over and over, eyes on the ground.

"How can I tell them?" she asked back in a broken voice that Hannibal had trouble hearing. "They didn't even want to listen to me when I told them what my father did. They just set me up with therapy because of how hysterical I was. You're the only one who listens, Dr. Eisner. The only one who believes me."

"And how are you dealing with the death of your father?" Hannibal asked, eyes intently on the girl, feeling oddly protective of her the more she told him about her family.

"Fine," she answered, blue eyes finally meeting Hannibal's. "I'm glad he's gone. He's been doing this to me for years. It's nice to know that I don't have to be afraid of my room anymore."

Hannibal gave a nod. "Have you decided what you're going to do with the child?"

Her eyes dropped back to the floor and her hands went back to braiding. "I want to get rid of it."

"Alright," Hannibal said with a nod. "Without your family knowing?"

"They would sacrifice me if they found out," Heidi whispered, falling back into her chair defeated, hands clutching the arm rests. "But I can't take care of a child, I'm going to be hurting my body if I do keep the child and my family... You've met my grandmother. You know how-how-how-"

"Unreasonable?" Hannibal offered gently.

"Yes!" Heidi agreed with a nod. "And I don't know where to go to get this taken care of. I don't know who to see or anything."

"You're not old enough to do anything medical without a guardian's permission," Hannibal pointed out and the girl only nodded in dismay. Hannibal sighed, thinking over the options in his head, Will's words from long ago coming to his head.

*"Saving people brings color to your cheeks."*

Hannibal rose to his feet and went to his desk, digging through some business cards he kept. Finding the one he wanted, he placed it on his desk and rewrote the English out in German for the girl and then returned to her, kneeling down beside her chair.

"This is for you," he said, holding out the small piece of paper. "You wait until you are alone and you call this number. Tell them that Hannibal Lecter gave you this number, do you understand?"

Heidi's face turned to one of confusion and she cautiously took the piece of paper. "Hannibal Lecter?" she repeated, testing the name in her mouth.

Hannibal gave a nod. "They will help you, no questions asked. No one will know, it will be discreet and safe. My private number is beneath it if you need anything."

"They will take care of the child?" she asked softly, blue eyes meeting maroon.

"If that is what you want, they will help you."

"Will you be there too? I don't want to be alone."

"If that is what you want," Hannibal repeated with a small nod.

It was risky to do this. Giving out phone numbers to unorthodox doctors was one thing. He had done it many times before. But giving out his name, especially to this child, was another. But he had to help her in any way that he could. He knew the type of family that she came from. He knew what they would do to her if they knew that she was pregnant, not to mention with her own father's child. It would put their family to ruins and that was something that the high class couldn't have. Heidi was bound to end up in a ditch way before the child could cause harm to their reputation.

Hannibal didn't necessarily approve of the situation. Under normal circumstances he wouldn't have offered such assistance, but this was a child being shoved into real adult problems that she wasn't mentally or physically capable of handling. And her safety was at risk. It was, over all, the best option.

"I will set up the appointment and tell you at our next session," Heidi said determinedly with a nod.

Hannibal gave her hand a small pat and rose back to his feet before sitting back down in his chair.

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"Well, this isn't on the map," Walter announced when they hit a large body of running water. It gleamed in the afternoon sun, bright and blinding. Walter lowered the map in his hands and gave a confused look down at his compass, up at the angle of the sun, then back to his compass. "We're going the right direction."

"Maybe the map is old?" Morgan said, kneeling down at the side of the fast moving water and dipping his hand into it. He rubbed at the back of his neck to cool down his skin before standing and going back over to Walter to look at the map.

"This river is older than the map," Walter said with a small laugh. "But at least we found water. Fill up the water bottle. Let me see if I can figure out where we are."

Walter took a seat on a rock and poured back over the map in his hand. It took a moment or two more of looking before he gave a sigh and closed his eyes.

"They altered the map."

"What do you mean they altered it?" Morgan asked, looking up from where he was refilling the water bottle.

"Father drew this map. It's not printed." Walter shifted the map around, looking closely over the carefully made details. "They purposefully left things off this map."

"But we're going the right way?" Morgan came over and passed the water bottle to Walter who looked at the decently clear water and took a sip of it, the coldness pleasant in his hot, dry mouth.

Walter nodded and passed the water bottle to Morgan. "We're going the right way." Walter sighed, wiping the sweat from his face. "How are you feeling? Are you holding up alright?"

"My feet hurt," Morgan said with a hint of complaint in his tone, though it had been the first that Walter had heard about it. "But I'm alright."

"Are you hungry?"

Morgan shook his head. "I'm ok for right now."

"Do you need to rest?"

"I'm fine, Wally," Morgan assured with a small smile. "Thank you."

"If you're alright, we need to keep moving." Walter dropped the backpack from his back and shoved the map into it before lacing the compass around his neck. "Take off your socks and shoes Morgan," Walter instructed, doing the same to his own feet. "Put them in the bag."

Once both were barefoot, and shoes were in the bag, Walter slowly lowered himself down into the river. The water was icy cold, most likely snow runoff from the mountains, but it felt nice against Walter's flushed skin.

"Stay here," he instructed when Morgan tried to follow. "I'll come back for you."

Walter made his way across the river, slipping in several places where the current became strong, but stayed standing. Once the backpack was safely on the other side, Walter turned and made his way back across the river.

Once over by Morgan, Walter turned around. "Get on my back. The current will be too strong for you and you'll be miserable the rest of the day if you're wet."

"But you're wet."

"It's ok, Morgan," Walter assured with a kind smile over his shoulder. "Let me take care of you. You can carry the backpack for a bit if you feel like you need to help."

Morgan did his best to shift on the shoreline and got onto Walter's back, his feet the only thing in the water.

"You good?" Walter questioned.

"Yes," Morgan replied, wrapping his arms around Walter's neck securely.

Walter made his way carefully across the river, feeling the way the water would push and pull him in directions now that he wasn't quite as stable, but he made it across without incident. Morgan was placed on the shoreline and Walter hoisted himself up and out of the river, breathing hard. He lied back in the dirt and grass, feet still in the water.

"Fill up the water bottle again, Morgan. Give me a moment or two to rest and we'll keep going."

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Will could hear the front door open and he stopped with a curious look halfway down the stairs.

He hadn't looked at the time, but he couldn't have been asleep very long. And the boys wouldn't be back yet. Will had made the trek himself to make sure it was doable and it had taken him nearly the whole day and part of the night to reach back home. If they left early enough it was possible that they could be back late tonight, but Will had no way of knowing how the boys were.

"Hannibal?" Will called cautiously into the house. It was possible that Hannibal had come home, but Will was certain that he hadn't been asleep for that long. There wasn't an answer and Will carefully made his way back to his room, trying to stay quiet.

He went to his bed and pulled his gun from under his pillow, checking that it was loaded and turned back to the door.

With a deep breath, body still unusually calm and drowsy from the medicine Hannibal had given him, he left the room. He took the first step and listened. He could just barely make out someone shuffling around downstairs.

Will kicked his slippers from his feet and stepped silently down the rest of the stairs, gun up and ready.

He glanced around the side of the stairs, looking up both sides of the hallway before stepping into it.

His heart was steady in his chest and his breathing was calm and silent and Will wasn't sure if that was due to the drugs or if the dangerous situations were just natural to him now.

In a blink, someone rounded the corner, body large and not one Will was familiar with. Will pulled the trigger, the gun jumping in his hand with a deafening crack in the small space, hitting his target. The man stumbled back and slid down the wall, bullet lodged in his skull.

There was another man and another crack, the second hitting the floor. Will checked quickly behind him and seeing no one else, moved further down the hall.

This house was huge with an infinite amount of room and an infinite amount of hiding places. Will couldn't very well clear the whole house alone, though he was certain that the others would get lost in the maze of halls that Will had taken careful time to memorize.

Will stepped over the bleeding bodies with no thought towards them and passed the kitchen, leaning inside of the door way before continuing on up the hall and further into the house.

For once Will was relieved that Morgan and Walter were away. Will didn't need them in the middle of this. Especially since Hannibal was still gone. That much was still apparent.

There would have been a mass of carnage for Will to find if Hannibal had been home. Hannibal would have used a knife or his hands and it would have been bloody, messy, lovely. He would have been protecting his family fully and perfectly just as he always had. The dutiful father who had stepped up even though he didn't have to.

Will made the round of the bottom floor before finding himself in the music room. He went to the window and pulled back the curtain just enough to look out to where a dark car sat across the street. One Will didn't recognize.

There had to be more of them. There wouldn't just be two. What had they wanted? Did they watch Hannibal leave and figure no one else was home and they could rob the place?

No. They weren't dressed for a robbery. Faces uncovered, broad daylight. This was something else, but Will wasn't sure what.

There was a sharp tug around his throat and Will gagged as a curtain cord wrapped around him. One hand struggled to slip under the fabric of the cord, but he couldn't quite find the strength, all bodily functions slowed from the drugs.

With a quick thought, Will placed the gun to the side of his head and tried to shoot at whoever was there, but something hit his wrist, knocking his gun to the floor.

Will gasped for air, both hands now tugging at the cord as his knees sagged and dropped him to the floor.

Thank God his children weren't home.

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Hannibal pulled into the driveway and slowed to a stop, eyes on the black vehicle across the road. He recognized it, but wasn't exactly sure where to place it. It didn't belong in this neighborhood though. He was certain of that.

He got from his car and stepped up to the house, keys in hand, but he stopped at the door. He reached out and pushed on the door and it swung open, having been partly ajar.

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder once more at the car and stepped into his home, closing the door behind him and locking it. He wasn't about to make the intruders' escape easy on them.

"Allan?" Hannibal called into the house, taking off his coat and hanging it up in the closet. He pulled his suit coat off and then his vest. There was no answer, the house off putting in its quiet. "Allen?" he asked again, pulling his tie from around his neck. "I'm home."

He rolled up his sleeves as he made his way further into the house. He stepped into the hallway and went for the stairs. Maybe he had just forgotten to close the door, though he doubted it. Will could just still be in bed, sleeping.

Hannibal stopped when he found Will's slippers on the stairs. Hannibal made his way back down the stairs and to the kitchen, pulling a knife from the knife block, noting the missing bar chair, before heading back into the hallway and to where two bodies were laying against the wall, shot in the head.

Hannibal gave a small smile at the idea of Will shooting the men, because that was obviously what had happened, the scent of gunpowder still hanging in the air.

The question was, where were they now? This house had been picked for the rooms. Many rooms to hold many secrets, but they were secrets that Hannibal didn't think that he had to find.

Hannibal made the round of the first floor until he found himself in the music room towards the front of the house. Near the piano, tied to a chair was a man slumped over with curly dark hair.

Hannibal looked around the room once more and finding no one, stepped over to Will, kneeling in front of him.

He took Will's face and Will jumped, eyes shooting open wide and searching. Hannibal frowned at the worry that was in them and the dark purple that was a round his throat.

He reached up and carefully pulled the duct tape from Will's mouth, who winced. "Where are they?" Hannibal asked softly, knife going to cut at the ropes that bound Will to the missing bar chair from the kitchen.

Will shook his head. "I don't know. I don't know how many there are or where they are." His voice was ragged and rough from being strangled. "I woke up and no one was here."

Hannibal gave a small nod, finally getting through one of the thick ropes, eyes scanning the room before returning to his work.

"And you're alright?" Hannibal asked again. Will gave a small nod. "Those shooting lessons with the boys look to have been paying off." It was a tease, something said in hopes of lightening the mood and maybe it did a bit.

"I wasn't a bad shot before," Will defended with a small smile. "I think they took my gun though." The ropes fell to the floor one by one and then Hannibal moved behind Will to cut at the ropes around his wrists that had cut deep into his skin, pulled tight.

"You have another," Hannibal reminded. "We have the safe."

"That's in the basement. We don't know where they are, Hannibal. Even if they're still here."

"They're here. The car is still out front." Will pulled his wrists in front of himself, rubbing at the ach in them now that they were free. Hannibal came back around and pulled Will from the chair, giving him a quick kiss. "You still look a little out of it. Are you going to be alright?"

"Fine," Will replied with a nod. "Been a while since we've done something like this."

Hannibal gave a nod and a smile. "Indecent."

"Erotic."

"Later, love." Hannibal placed another kiss to Will's lips and gave a deep breath. "We have other things to worry about at the moment."

"Do you know who they are?" Will asked, following Hannibal through the house and to a door in the hall that could have been thought of as a closet from its position. Hannibal started down the stairs and Will followed after him, keeping their steps quiet as they made their way down to the basement.

"I have an idea," Hannibal replied with a nod, dress shoes looking out of place across the blue gymnastic mats that were on the floor. "I believe it has something to do with the Schneider girl."

"What about her?" Will stopped as Hannibal opened up the door to where they kept the gun safe. He let Will step inside and Will punched in their code, pulling open the door to the large black metal box. He reached for another one of his many handguns and then a few loaded clips, shoving one into the gun and cocking it before shoving another clip or two into the pockets of his lounge pants.

Will glanced up when there wasn't an answer and found a fond smile on Hannibal's lips. Will gave a grin and a snort. "Me loading a gun isn't sexy, Hannibal," Will scolded sarcastically.

"I beg to differ," Hannibal argued, voice light as he watched Will work. "It's as sexy as the dead bodies in the hallway, Will."

"What happened with the girl, Hannibal?" Will closed the safe and stepped from the room, letting Hannibal close the door behind him.

"She has high connections with powerful people who, according to our session today, do not like me or the way that I have stepped into the girl's life," Hannibal explained.

"Powerful how?" Will started for the stairs, voice now lowered.

"Money, dirty money."

"Drug money?"

"It's a possibility, though I wouldn't put it past them to obtain money in other ways," Hannibal replied softly, stopping behind Will as Will checked the top of the stairs.

"Do they know what you did?" Will asked, glancing back at Hannibal for a moment, hoping to read his husband's face.

"I can't fully say, though her father was a prominent person in their family."

Will frowned with a huff of air. "Hannibal, we've talked about this. You can't just kill off people in positions of-"

"The girl is pregnant, Will," Hannibal grumbled, twisting the knife in his hand to a more comfortable position. "She is the same age as Walter and looks just like Abigail. I could not sit there and do nothing."

"Sentimental bastard," Will muttered, checking the top of the stairs once more before leaving them and stepping back into the hallway. Will couldn't be mad though. Not in the slightest. If anything happened to Walter or Morgan he would hunt down whoever hurt them and do away with them slowly. Even if it was Hannibal. Nothing and no one would come between him and his children and Hannibal knew that well enough. Hannibal knew he wasn't an exception to the rule. Not this rule. Not that Hannibal ever would hurt them. "Where would you hide in this house, Hannibal? Where would you go?"

"Empathize Will," Hannibal instructed beside him. "The leader of your underground ring fucked his own daughter and got her pregnant. She starts therapy to stop her hysterical outbursts because the family doesn't believe her and soon after the leader goes missing and is later found murdered with incriminating parts of him cut off and stuffed down his throat."

Will blinked and glanced over Hannibal who was still as calm and collected as ever though there was that fire in his eyes, his voice harsh. "You-You..." Will trailed off, nearly snorting with laughter at the picture of the man in a position he very much deserved, dick shoved down his throat. "Wish I could have seen that one."

"Focus Will."

Will inhaled deeply, letting his eyes close, knowing Hannibal would be more than able to protect him while he was trapped in his own head.

Hannibal was silent, letting Will work, watching his face. It was always interesting to see Will do what the FBI had hounded him for years over. It wasn't special if one were to walk in on it happening. Will's face would sometimes twist into odd expressions, sometimes his hands would move and he would talk to himself. Other times he was completely silent and still, features carved from stone.

"They will be searching for any information on her," Will said, eyes still closed. "They know that you take notes. They want to know what she has said during your sessions. They don't care about confidentiality. They care about silencing you. You're the link."

"They'll be in my study."

"Odd they wouldn't go to your office." Will's eyes opened, and he looked a little dazed and tired, having had to work through the drugs still in his system to find his answers.

"It's the family," Hannibal offered, his own opinion coming through now that he had Will's to work with. "Family is important. They want to take someone from mine because I took someone from

theirs."

"They know you did it then?"

"I'm the only possible suspect they could come back to," Hannibal answered. "The women in the family are told to be quiet and look the other way. They wouldn't believe the girl, they aren't about to step into the man's domain and do their work for them. The only one outside of the girl's family who knows and would do anything about it would be me."

"And they didn't kill me." Will inhaled deeply as the parts began to fall into place even further. "They don't want me dead and they don't want you dead. They would have killed you when you came in and untied me."

"They want Morgan and Walter," Hannibal hissed.

"Walter specifically. He's the same age as the girl, right?" Will frowned at Hannibal's nod. "They want him in place of her."

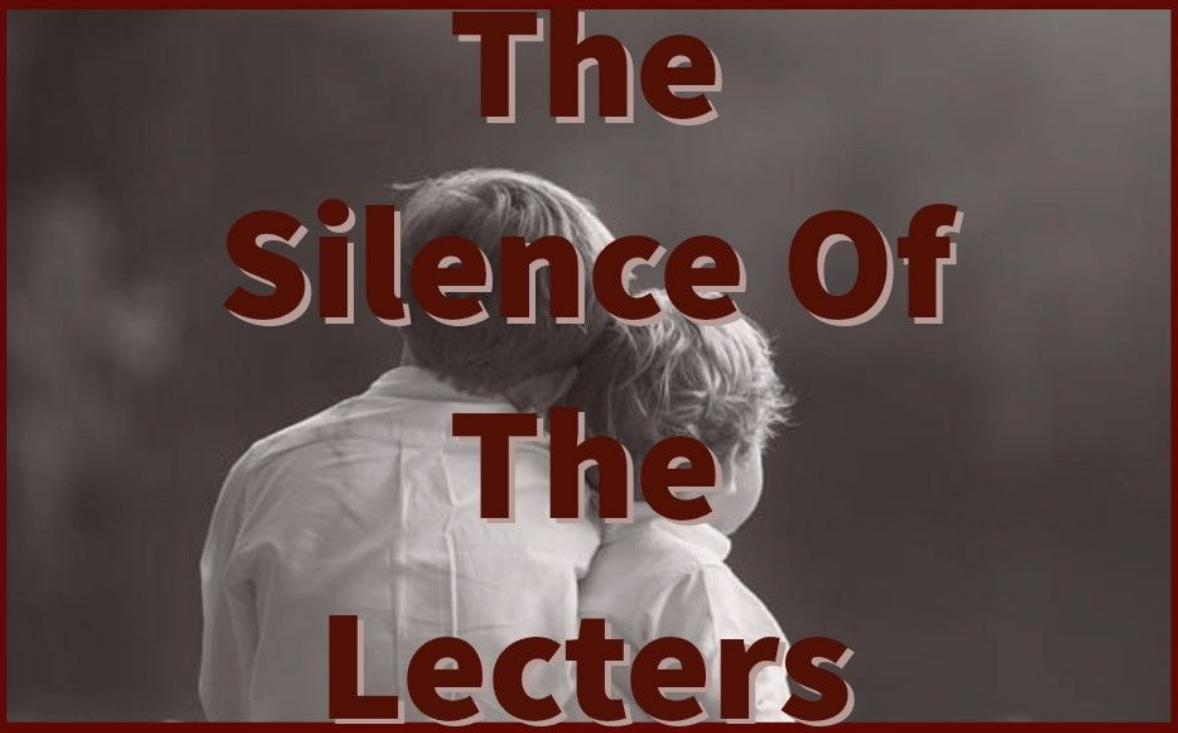
# Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal's eyes landed on Walter who inhaled deeply with a firm nod. He understood. Hannibal was letting him into a part of his world, a part that Walter knew he kept well hidden from them. Something that Hannibal didn't want the boys to be a part of but now they were.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


The
Silence Of
The
Lecters

“I’m cold,” Morgan mumbled as they continued to trudge along, the sun long since set now. He pulled the space blanket closer around himself, trying to keep up with Walter’s larger steps.

“We’re almost there,” Walter pushed with as light of a voice as he could. “You can see the house.”

“Aren’t you cold?”

“I’m still wet, of course I’m cold,” Walter answered with a small nod. His shorts had rubbed him raw from having walked in them while wet, but at least his shoes were dry. He was hungry and tired and ready for a shower. Anything to warm up his burning limbs. “I promise we’re almost there.”

“If they ask how things went, tell them the truth,” Morgan stated strongly, the blanket making an annoying fluttering sound as he walked.

“The truth?”

“Yeah. I floundered and wasn’t of any help,” Morgan answered, causing Walter to stop in his steps and look over the younger boy. “Don’t tell them I did anything good. You took care of me the whole time.”

“Morgan, you kept yourself alive just as much as I did. And you noticed the snake before I stepped on him. I never even saw him. Could you imagine having to take care of that? It would have been a mess.”

"Is that a thank you?"

Walter laughed. "Yes. Thank you Morgan." He snatched up Morgan's hand and pulled Morgan along. "We're nearly there. Doesn't father's cooking sound wonderful? Something warm?"

Morgan smiled. "Yes," he agreed. "Wonderful."

Walter pulled Morgan all of the way to the back of the house and stepped up onto the porch, reaching for the back door and stopping. The blanket and backpack were dropped to the porch, both now completely forgotten.

"Somethings wrong," Morgan muttered. "The lights are off."

"Let's go to the front of the house," Walter muttered softly, still holding tightly to Morgan's hand. "See if the cars are here."

They went around to the front of the house and Walter looked over the cars in their driveway curiously. There was Hannibal's and Will's, one that Will never drove, and then several black cars on the street. Cars that Walter didn't know but was certain didn't belong there.

"I want you to stay out here Morgan," Walter muttered, dropping Morgan's hand.

"No," Morgan stated strongly, heading for the front door. Walter raced after Morgan and nearly ran into him when the door didn’t open, locked. “The window next to the laundry room should be open. I can fit through it and come open the door.”

“Morgan, you know something is wrong here,” Walter warned, hands and feet antsy, chest tight. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I’ll be fine,” Morgan stated, walking back from the front door, and continuing around the house. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

Morgan turned the corner of the dark house and found the small window to the laundry room that only he would have been able to fit through. He lifted up the pane and lowered himself down, feet first. He had to suck in his stomach and hold his breath to shove his torso through the window, but he dropped down to the concrete floor without a problem.

He went for the door to the laundry room and carefully pushed it open, glancing around the door before leaving the room when nothing was wrong. He closed the door behind himself and stepped quietly through the house that was empty. There wasn’t a sound to be heard.

Everything was cold and dark. No food being made, no classical music playing, no laughter or kind chatter from his parents. It was a ghost town and it set Morgan on edge. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end as he came to the main hallway and saw something slumped in the middle of the hall. Morgan slowly moved closer, heart nearly beating out of his chest.

Two bodies lay huddled in the hallway. Large men that Morgan didn’t know, had never seen. Each with a hole in their heads, both dead and sitting in their own blood.

Morgan wasn’t exactly sure what his body was telling him to do. There was an icy cold that washed over him from the top of his skull, pooling around his ears, tensing his shoulders, all the way down to his feet. It was a strange feeling, the atmosphere was just complete nothingness around him, though he knew this wasn’t right. This was wrong, but he wasn’t sure what to do about it. Should he scream? Should he run? Should he... get Walter. That was what he was supposed to do.

Morgan carefully stepped over the bodies, almost afraid one would jump up and grab him like those zombies in those books he had read about. Luckily neither of them moved and Morgan raced to the front door, unlocking it and pulling it open.

Walter’s brows furrowed as he took in the ragged looking Morgan in front of him. “What’s wrong?”

“D-Dead,” Morgan stuttered out. “Dead men in the hallway.”

Walter gave a small nod and knelt, taking Morgan’s shoulders. He could remember the feeling of seeing his first dead body. He could remember the feeling of seeing his second dead body. It didn’t get any easier. Somehow the second time was worse because it shoved him back into the first one to live again. And he knew Morgan had watched at least Margot die, so this must have been worse for him too.

“It’s alright Morgan,” Walter assured softly. “They can’t hurt you.”

“I miss my moms, Walter,” Morgan whispered, eyes distant.

Walter frowned. “I know, Morgan. I miss my mom too, but right now we need to focus. Can you do that for me?” Morgan gave a small nod and Walter smiled. “Good. Do you remember how you protected me from David? Do you remember how brave and strong you were?” Morgan gave another nod. “I need you to be like that again.”

“Alright.”

Walter got back to his feet and glanced around the entryway, taking it in. Nothing was off, nothing inherently wrong, but it was wrong. Hannibal and Will should have been here, and they weren’t.

“Come with me,” Walter instructed, taking Morgan’s hand, and leading him towards the kitchen.

They needed weapons, something to keep them safe, but Walter didn’t know the combination to the gun safe so this was their next best option. In the kitchen he found the knife block that was already missing a knife and gave a sigh, pulling one out for him and one for Morgan. They had been trained with knives, just not as extensively with guns and Walter was far more confident with a gun, even if he wasn’t a very good shot. It provided distance and safety. This was close and would most likely end up in him getting hurt as well.

“Where would you take Father and Dad?” Walter asked softly into the quiet kitchen.

“Somewhere private,” Morgan offered. “Somewhere you could do what you want with them, and no one would hear.”

“Somewhere.... Hidden away?” Walter gave a shrug, not feeling any closer. “Who wants Father dead? Let’s start there.”

“Everyone?” Morgan answered honestly. “He says everyone from his old life wants him dead.”

“These aren’t people from his old life. They’re German.” Walter sighed and rubbed at his eyes. “I’m German and I’m mad at Hannibal for something. What does Hannibal do when he’s not home? He holds therapy sessions. So, I’m a patient, or someone close to a patient. What do I want with Hannibal?”

“Notes from our sessions?” Morgan asked back, shooting in the dark and very nearly certain that it was the wrong answer.

“The study?” Walter took Morgan’s hand and pulled him from the kitchen.

“We don’t know where his study is,” Morgan pointed out.

“The west wing,” Walter answered with a smile. “You should have come exploring with me instead of reading your book.”

Walter led Morgan through the house, up the stairs and past their parent’s room, down a long hall and into a part of the house that Morgan didn’t recognize, though it was just as gothic and medieval like the rest of the house.

Walter came to a stop outside of a door that Morgan could see a light coming out from under. That wasn’t right either, if the dead bodies in the hall weren’t anything to go on. Hannibal was never in his study later than nine o’clock. He made it a point to stop working by nine so that he could be with his family. Normally he finished working earlier than that to cook dinner, but nine was the cut off. It had always been the cut off after Will and Hannibal had fought about Hannibal working too much.

“We can’t just walk in,” Morgan whispered at the sound of voices from the other side of the door.

“You know how there’s the dumbwaiter in the kitchen?” Walter asked softly. “It goes up to the storage room. There’s another one in the study. It’s down in the basement. That weird little door in the training room.”

“Can we both fit in there?”

“I don’t see why not. But we must do something. They’re in trouble, and you know it.”

Walter took Morgan’s free hand once more and led him back up the winding hallways and they raced back down the stairs and into the other hall, down another flight of stairs until they reached the training room, blue matts giving way under their shoes.

“And you’ve used this before?” Morgan asked as Walter pushed open the two small doors that were in the wall that Morgan had always wondered what they were for. Walter shook his head and motioned for Morgan to come over to him. Walter put his knife in his teeth and picked Morgan up, setting him inside for the small dumbwaiter. He pulled the knife from his mouth and hoisted himself up and into the cramped space, almost on top of Morgan as he shifted to fit his legs inside. “It’s a pulley system. It shouldn’t be too hard to figure out.” He reached out and took one of the ropes. “One side goes up; the other goes down.” He pulled on the rope and the dumbwaiter jolted upright, relatively quiet for its age.

“And how do you know that it comes out in the right room?”

“I haven’t seen any other room in this house to have a dumbwaiter door in any other rooms in this house and we’re allowed into all of them. It doesn’t leave many options for where this one will end up.”

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Will watched quietly as a fist collided with Hannibal’s face again. There wasn’t much Will could do from where he sat, tied once more to a chair on one side of Hannibal’s overly large desk and Hannibal was tied to a chair on the other side of the overly large desk.

Will had done his best to try to wet the duct tape that was back over his mouth with his tongue, but he could seem to loosen the tape up. He twisted and strained his hands against the ropes once more around his wrists, but all the knots held good. The hours only seemed to crawl by like years until the clock on the desktop chimed out the time, telling him how long it had been. It was midnight and the twelve little bongs were echoing loud in the silent room aside from the assaults on Hannibal that had been going on from the moment they had lost their battle.

There were a good six or seven that Hannibal and Will had dropped before the remaining five brought them down. Will’s shoulder was bleeding freely from a gunshot wound, but he hadn’t passed out yet, so he figured it wasn’t going to kill him. Not right away at least. Hannibal had been hit over the head with a vase, knocking him unconscious, though the man was incredibly conscious now.

The man who had punched Hannibal, someone with the name of Johann, that sounded more like a sneeze than an actual name, stood upright. Will watched as the man with a strong build and shockingly white blond hair, looked over the rings he wore that were covered in Hannibal’s blood.

Johann had introduced himself as the brother of Schmidt, Heidi’s father, Heidi being Hannibal’s patient as Will had pieced together easily enough. Or at least, he hoped that he had understood it all

correctly. His German was laughable at best, and he had barely a hope to speak a lick of it back, the duct tape having nothing to do with the inability.

Hannibal was silent as he straightened himself up the best that he could around the ropes holding him in place. Blood poured down his face from his nose, turning the silvery cloth of the duct tape into a shining ruby red. His cheek was so cut up it was a wall of blood and he looked like he had been crying possibly. His eyes were red and wet looking.

Will glanced around at the other four in the room. Each one looked to be around the same build as Ansgar and Will figured they were all part of the family business, whatever that was. But it had to be underground enough that they were specially trained in combat. All were facing Hannibal and Will, ready to attack if something ended up happening.

“Your children still haven’t returned home, Dr. Klaus Eisner,” Johann said in German, as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and began cleaning his knuckles and rings. “I’m beginning to wonder if you ever had any children. Though Heidi has mentioned that you talk about your two boys quite often.”

Hannibal simply stared at Johann, breathing hard through a bloody nose. He wouldn’t have said anything even if he could have spoken. If his children were far away from here, then he was more than happy to continue getting beaten down. He nearly hoped that the boys had gotten lost on their way back so that they wouldn’t come across the scene.

Johann motioned one of his men forward and Hannibal could only watch as the brute moved to Will, placing the cold barrel of the gun to Will’s temple. Will’s eyes met Hannibal’s for a moment, though he didn’t look too terribly worried. A gun to Will’s head was nothing new, but his eyes quickly shut when the hammer was pulled back, causing him to flinch.

“Now, Dr. Eisner,” Johann stated, a hand taking the back of Hannibal’s chair next to Hannibal’s shoulder. “Since your children are nowhere to be found, I don’t think you would mind if we replace them with your... domestic partner.”

Will inhaled deeply, steadying his racing pulse and opened his eyes, nearly wanting to shout when he saw a small set of doors in the wall opposite him slide open. The dumbwaiter that hadn’t been used in years and was eerily silent was opened to reveal both of Will’s sons to him. Will’s heart sank as he watched Walter carefully lower Morgan to the ground.

Will’s eyes flickered over to Hannibal who was shooting Will daggers to not give their children away. Will did his best to keep his eyes away from the dumbwaiter, but he couldn’t help but watch as Morgan noiselessly removed his shoes and rose to his feet.

Walter lowered himself down as well, removing his shoes to keep as silent as possible, a knife held firmly in his hand. He motioned for Morgan to stay back before stepping forward and further into the room. Will looked back towards Johann who had continued speaking, though Will didn’t much care to try to pick out what he was saying. He was hoping that Walter would see the warning, the begging in his eyes that was telling them to go back.

Walter stayed as close to the edges of the room as he could, moving slowly and trying not to be noticed. He had to get to Will. Will was the one most in danger now and the person who Walter was most likely going to get spotted trying to help. But the others were stupid, far too caught up in whatever their boss was saying to notice Walter’s micro movements.

Walter stopped as the blond man laughed, German coming from his mouth and for once Walter didn't struggle to understand. "*Es ist nicht persönlich, Herr Eisner. Du bist das einzige, was Klaus verletzen kann*." *(It's not personal, Mr. Eisner. You're the only thing that can hurt Klaus.)*

Walter took a deep breath, speaking before he could tell his mind to stop. "*Es ist persönlich für mich*." *(It's personal to me.)* Walter didn't hesitate. He put the blade to the hand that held the gun to Will's head and pulled across the man's wrist as hard as he could. Blood splattered Will's shocked face as the gun fell to the ground. Walter fell to his knees, scooping up the gun. He didn't need to waste a bullet on the man that was now on the ground, crying out in pain. He would bleed out eventually. Walter had severed the artery. "Morgan," he called, sliding the gun across the floor and to the little boy who stood stunned.

Walter made sure that Morgan snatched up the gun before working the kitchen knife under the ropes around Will's wrists, cutting through them. There was a crack as the gun went off and Walter couldn't stop his jump, glancing up to see one of the other men fall to the ground. Once Will's hands were free enough for Will to finish untying himself, Walter raced back over to Morgan, who was being surrounded by the other two men who were still standing.

Walter fell to his knees at the feet of one of the men and used both hands to stab the kitchen knife into the man's leg. He gave a cry of pain and crumpled to the floor. Walter yanked the knife free, not thinking it would be as difficult as pulling Excalibur from the stone would have been. But with the knife now free, blood gushing from the man's thigh, Walter drove the knife into the man's chest as far as he could, hand slipping down the blade. There was a sharp pain that filled Walter's hand, but he ignored it as his blood coated the knife, he just pushed at the knife until it was buried hilt deep into the man's chest.

There was another gunshot that went off, the last of the men beside Morgan falling to the ground. Walter looked up to meet Morgan's face, both breathing hard, Morgan pale as shock quickly filled him, hand trembling on the gun. Walter was about to reach for the gun, but there was another loud crack that filled the room and an agonized cry from Will as a needle like pain filled Walter's shoulder.

Walter gasped, a hand reaching back and feeling a stickiness begin to soak the back of his shirt. His hands trembled and he gave a small laugh, slumping over, eyes up at the ceiling. He couldn't bring himself to move, the pain unlike anything he had ever experienced before. This wasn't a sting from a paintball. This wasn't a burn from a chalk pellet. This was a swallowing heat that radiated from his shoulder and through his mind, making it the only thing he could clearly think about.

Will watched in absolute horror as Walter's body collapsed to the floor, the sound coming from his mouth inhuman. Walter would be alright. He would be. He had to be, Will kept repeating to himself.

Will's fingers worked as quickly as they could as the gun was aimed now at Morgan who still stood by the dumbwaiter, his own gun up, but of no use to him if he didn't focus. And there was nothing Will could blame the boy for. He had just killed two men and Will remembered the panic attack he had had when he had killed Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Will pushed the rest of the ropes from around his body and raced from his chair and to Morgan. Will wasn't sure which one came first, it happened too quickly. He didn't know if he heard the blast of the gunshot or felt the bullet hit his back. He didn't care. He knelt in front of Morgan and Morgan was safe. Pale and shaking, but bullet free and safe.

“Give me the gun, Morgan,” Will whispered softly with a small smile, ignoring the pain that was quickly spreading through his entire body, something much more mind numbing than the bullets that normally graced his arms were. Will reached out and carefully pulled the revolver from Morgan’s hands. There would be two rounds left if Will did his math correctly. He had watched the gun be loaded. Five rounds. One in his shoulder, and two in these men. Two rounds left just for him. “Get down and stay small.” Will groaned as another shot rang out, something hitting his side this time, missing everything important, but still burning. He waited for Morgan to obey, laying on the ground and curling up into a tiny ball before he scooped up the discarded kitchen knife and pushed himself to his feet, gun up and aimed at Johann when he turned around.

Walter watched through tear filled eyes as Will aimed the gun, pulling the trigger before the blond man had time to get another round off. The bullet met the man’s thigh, and his leg gave out under him, sending him crashing to the floor. Will stepped forward, strong as if he hadn’t been shot at all and kicked the gun away from the blond man’s reach.

The gun in Will’s hand went off again, this time lining the man’s crotch with liquid red. The man screamed, hands going to where his junk no longer was and Will tossed the now empty gun aside, kneeling beside Johann.

“You hurt my sons, I hurt you,” Will hissed, not caring if the man didn’t understand. Not caring if the man was too engrossed in what was between his legs. Will lifted the knife up and brought it down into Johann’s arm, smiling at another scream. Will pulled the knife free, bringing it down again and again and again, blood splattering him, screams soon falling silent, but he couldn't bring himself to stop. Not until this man paid for everything he had done, not just to the Heidi girl, but to Will’s own family.

His arms and back cried out in pain and eventually the last stab sent the knife through Johann’s neck, pinning him to the ground with a hearty thud into the wooden floor. Will’s chest heaved as he put his weight into the knife for balance, vision blurring, curious if Jordan was this tired after stabbing two people thirteen times each whenever he killed.

Will released the knife and fell onto his hands and knees before his arms gave out and he fell to the floor, utterly spent.

It took Morgan a moment, but his head popped up at the silence and he sat fully upright, taking in the room. He needed to help, needed to do something, but his limbs felt like liquid as he pushed himself to his feet.

He stumbled through the room and over to where Hannibal still sat, tied to a chair. Morgan went around to the back of Hannibal and his trembling fingers pulled at the knots around Hannibal’s wrists, an eternity passing before he was able to get them undone. As soon as Hannibal’s hands were free, he pushed at the ropes holding his body to the chair, up and over his head and then ripped the duct tape from his mouth. He got to his feet, reaching out and pulling Morgan to him in a hug.

“I need you to listen to me, *kleiner hase*,” Hannibal said, voice urgent. “Your dad and Walter need help and you need to help me. I can’t work on both of them myself. Can you help me?” Morgan gave a small nod and Hannibal patted his head. “You did so well, *kleiner hase.* I’m so proud of you. We just need to work a little longer and then we can all rest, alright?” Another nod was Hannibal’s answer. “Good. Can you please go and make sure that the desk is cleared off?”

Morgan got to his feet and went over to the desk, pushing everything on it gracelessly onto the floor with a loud crash, but Hannibal didn't mind. He knelt next to Will who met his gaze with a small huff of laughter.

"Still hurts," he whispered roughly. "You would think that after all of the times I've been shot, I would be used to it."

"Are you alright if I work on Walter first?" Hannibal asked, brushing back Will's curls.

Will gave a nod, licking at his lips and closing his eyes. "I can wait," Will agreed softly.

"*Nužudymas suteikia tavo skruostams spalvą, mano meile*." *(Killing brings color to your cheeks, my love.)* Will gave a small laugh at Hannibal's words and Hannibal quickly went over to where Walter lay on the ground, kneeling beside his son. "*Jums bus gerai, mangustėl,*" *(You'll be fine, mongoose.)* Hannibal whispered to Walter who gave a pained nod.

"Morgan," Hannibal continued as he scooped Walter as carefully as he could from the floor. "In that cabinet I have medical equipment. I need you to grab everything I need to remove bullets."

"Ok," Morgan said with a nod, rushing over to the cabinet and pulling it open.

Hannibal rested Walter down on the desk, sitting up, and began tearing apart Walter's t-shirt that was dirty from trekking through the forest all day and wet, most likely from the river, Hannibal reasoned.

"Morgan, there's a bathroom across the hall. Find something to put some warm water in and get some rags."

Morgan placed the medical supplies he had gathered on the desktop and quickly rushed from the room.

"*Mangustėl,*" Hannibal said, his hands taking Walter's face. "How are you feeling?"

Walter gave a forced laugh. "It fucking hurts," he answered. "And do not tell me about watching my language, Father." Walter gave another laugh and Hannibal smiled. "You look like shit."

"I can wait," Hannibal assured. Morgan came back into the room with a bowl of water that had several rags in it. "Thank you, *kleiner hase.* Can you attend to Walter's hand while I work on the rest of him?"

Morgan nodded and took a rag from the bowl, ringing it out before snatching up Walter's wrist and wiping at his palm that was sliced through. Walter winced and Morgan flinched muttering a small sorry before continuing to work. He placed gauze into the cleaned slash and began wrapping at it.

"Morgan, go check on your dad, please," Hannibal pushed as he focused in on finding the bullet lodged in Walter's shoulder with a pair of tweezers.

Morgan nodded and went over to where Will was lying in a puddle of blood, possibly his own or the butchered man beside him. Morgan knelt and took Will's hand, causing Will's eyes to flicker open, the blue dull.

"I'm sorry," Morgan whispered, tears blurring his eyes despite how hard he tried to push the emotions down. If the emotions broke through it was difficult for Morgan to hold them back. He

normally had to let them run their course until he could begin again, but he needed to be strong right now. He had to be there for his parents. They needed him. "I'm sorry Dad."

"Shh," Will hushed, forcing himself to sit up. His face was twisted in pain as he reached out for Morgan, pulling him into a hug, effectively covering them both in blood. "Quiet. You did nothing wrong. You did everything we taught you to. Do not feel guilty. I will always protect you, Morgan. Always."

"Fuck!" Walter hissed loudly from the desk, hands clutching the edge of it with clenched teeth, tears rolling down his cheeks without his permission as he ignored the throbbing in his hand that held to the desk.

"Hush, *mangustėl*," Hannibal instructed, hand taking Walter's other shoulder to hold the boy still as he worked. "It splintered into pieces. Just be patient." Hannibal grabbed one of the cloths from the bowl and wiped at Walter's back, washing away the dirt and blood that was making a muddy mess against the boy's skin. "I think we're nearly done. Morgan!" Hannibal glanced behind him and gave a small smile at Will hugging the boy, the smile shooting pain through his battered cheek. "I need clean water. Can you fetch that please?"

Morgan jumped to his feet and moved back to the desk to scoop up the dirty, bloody bowl and took it from the room.

Hannibal looked back to his work, pulling another piece of metal from his son's back, causing Walter to groan. Hannibal glanced up as a body leaned against the desk and found a tired and sweaty Will, painted in liquid red, face twisted in pain.

"You should be resting," Hannibal scolded. "You know-"

"I can't rest. And they're just bullets," Will interrupted. His hand took the desk for balance, and he carefully made his way around it. Hannibal huffed in dislike, pulling another mangled shard of metal free from Walter’s shoulder.

"Dammit," Walter called out, fist slamming against the desk. He could feel Hannibal's hand take his head and he was waiting to be reprimanded, but his Father simply placed a kiss into his dirty, sweaty hair.

"That's the last of it," Hannibal assured, glancing down as Morgan placed the now fresh water onto the desk. "Thank you, *kleiner hase*. Grab me some gauze, please."

Walter could feel the warm cloth press into his back, cleaning at the wound and making him bite his tongue until he could taste copper in his mouth. Hands on his face made him look up and to Will who looked high beyond belief. Will's thumbs brushed at Walter's tears, more effectively smearing his face with blood than helping.

Walter whimpered as a needle was pushed into his skin and the intruding feeling of something being pulled through his skin made him want to run.

"I'm proud of you," Will said softly, words nearly slurred together. "You're so strong Walter." Will leaned over and placed a kiss to his son's head. "I love you."

"Love you too Dad," Walter got out through his teeth. With stitches done, his wound was wrapped, the bandages going across his body.

Walter sighed, letting his body relax. He was home. He was safe now. His parents were here, and he didn't need to be in charge anymore. All he wanted to do was sleep in a bed, the poor choices of not sleeping the night before beginning to burn his bones.

"Walter, I need you and Morgan to listen to me," Hannibal said as he came around the desk to be by both boys, hands on each of their shoulders respectively. "We're not done yet. We still need to clean this place up. Do you understand what I am telling you?"

Walter glanced over at the floor that was a mess of bodies and blood, a stench beginning to fill the room. They weren't done yet. Nowhere near done. The night was still young if the job ahead of them had anything to say about it.

"I know what I am asking of you is hard and you have both gone through so much already, but I need to look over your dad and take care of him. I can't do everything by myself," Hannibal continued. "Do not strain yourselves. You're overworked, but I need you boys to gather the cleaning supplies from my storage room. The key is on my keyring downstairs. Do you understand what I am telling you Walter?"

Hannibal's eyes landed on Walter who inhaled deeply with a firm nod. He understood. Hannibal was letting him into a part of his world, a part that Walter knew he kept well hidden from them. Something that Hannibal didn't want the boys to be a part of but now they were.

"Morgan," Walter stated, glancing down at the younger boy who was sickly pale and going through whatever motions that anyone put in front of him. "Go get Father's keys. I will be downstairs in a moment. Wait for me." Morgan gave a small nod and stepped through the mess of bodies and blood, leaving the room.

Hannibal released Walter's shoulder and Walter dropped down from the desk, watching as his father helped his dad sit down on the desk, hands steadying Will's hips.

"Walter, do not let Morgan into that room. I need you to promise me that you will not let Morgan into that room," Hannibal stated strongly as he unbuttoned Will's shirt.

"I promise," Walter said with a nod.

"Morgan is on the edge of going into shock and if he sees what's in that room he will. I cannot deal with that at the moment, not until Will is taken care of."

"I understand," Walter assured, heading for the door, bare feet sliding in the stickiness of the blood, it gushing up between his toes unpleasantly.

"Walter, please take it easy on your body," Hannibal reminded. "I don't need you tearing your stitches."

Walter left the room and made his way down the hall that was going to need to be cleaned as well now that blood was being tracked through the house, Walter followed a set of smallest footprints through the halls.

He found himself back downstairs and Morgan was waiting at the foot of the stairs with Hannibal's keys in hand, outstretched towards Walter.

"Morgan, I need you to stay outside of this room," Walter instructed as they made their way towards the basement and down another flight of stairs. There were too many stairs in this house. Walter wasn't sure if his legs could carry him up and down multiple times. "I'm going to hand things to you for you to run to Father. Do you understand?"

"Wally, I don't feel good," Morgan muttered softly.

"Just a little longer, Morgan. We're nearly done. I promise." Walter passed by their training room and went for the door at the end of the hall, stopping in front of it and finding the key that he knew belonged to the door. The key was different from the other keys. Something shaped a little differently than the others. "Stay here."

Walter unlocked the door and felt around for a light switched, flicking it on and closing the door behind himself. Walter glanced around at the narrow cement hallway in front of him that was dimly lit and reminded him of the dungeons in the video games he sometimes played when he couldn't sleep. With small steps he followed the hallway until it opened into a large room. Walter blinked and did his best to take it all in, staring at something like out of a horror film.

Full surgical equipment filled half of the room with a large silver table that had small coves along the sides with a tube that led into the ground. There were trays holding tools, each one polished to perfection. Lights hung from the ceiling, like something from a medical tv show. Lights that were used in surgery rooms, large and round.

The other half were more tools, separated in the middle with what looked like chains and hooks from the ceiling, those cleaned to a shining silver as well.

Walter stepped further into the room, heart in his chest, taking in the other tools. Things from a workshop. Table saw. Band saw. A mass array of power tools that Walter wasn't even sure what they were supposed to do.

And a freezer? Maybe? It was like a second room, glass doors, fogged up and painted with delicate patterns of ice. Walter could make something out in the center. Something dark and tall, but he didn't dare open the door to see what it was.

Walter swallowed at the lump in his throat and licked at his lips, willing his heart to slow, to relax, reminding himself that he had known all along. He had always known, so there was no reason to feel the way he did. But he had every right to feel like his world was about to crumble out from under his feet.

Cleaning supplies.

The words snapped into Walter's head, and he inhaled deeply, lungs burning from holding his breath. He let the new rush of adrenaline move him to where there were shelves lined with bottles and other various items. Walter snatched up a bucket and a scrub brush and began to fill the bucket with other brushes that he found, and then he grabbed a large bottle of bleach that made his arm twinge painfully under the weight.

Walter winced but carried the items back through the room and up the hallway, opening the door and causing Morgan to jump.

"Here. Take these to father and hurry back. I'll have more for you," Walter stated, voice much calmer than he anticipated it being.

"You're-" Will gasped loudly as his shirt was yanked from his body. "You're letting Walter into your room?"

"He already knows who I am," Hannibal muttered, doing his best not to hurt Will, but knowing it was impossible. "From the moment he knew my name, he knew what I was."

"And you think that-"

"He stabbed two people without a second thought," Hannibal interrupted, tossing Will's shirt aside and taking in all the damage to Will's body. "Seeing my room is not going to affect him."

Hannibal reached for a washcloth and began cleaning the blood from Will's arm and then his back to better see what he was working with. The shoulder and the side would be easy enough to deal with. They were through and through, just needing to be cleaned and patched up, nothing torn, nothing hit. But the one in Will's back had Hannibal concerned.

Hannibal needed to save that for last. The bullet was still in him and would help stop the blood flow for the time being. The other two needed to be dealt with immediately.

Hannibal grabbed a bottle of peroxide and gave a chuckle at Will's apprehensive expression. Hannibal took Will's shoulder and leaned him back just slightly.

"I hate that stuff, Hannibal," Will grumbled.

"It's not iodine," Hannibal pointed out, almost enjoying the way that Will's face twisted up with a loud moan, fist slamming into the desk like Walter's had as Hannibal poured the clear liquid onto the wound. "We have to clean it."

"You used alcohol wipes on Walter," Will complained through clenched teeth, trying to ignore the way the liquid made his skin bubble up and the burn that would not go away.

"I didn't think I would need to treat you like a child, Will," Hannibal teased, wiping at Will's shoulder once more, before dumping some of the peroxide onto the exit wound, receiving a very similar reaction from Will again.

"Shit. Stop reveling in my pain."

"I wonder where Walter gets his mouth from," Hannibal dead panned. "What else have you been teaching the boys while I'm away?"

"H-Hannibal," Will gasped, hand darting out and taking one of Hannibal's, breathing hard, head spinning. "I'm going to throw up."

Hannibal glanced around the room and snatched up his trash can from under his desk, holding it out to Will. Will grabbed it and Hannibal ignored the gagging sound that came from Will. He simply went to work preparing a needle and thread to stitch up Will. Will's heaving came to a stop, and he kept his head in the trash can, breathing hard.

"We have to move," he pointed out, voice muffled in the bin. Hannibal took the bin from Will's hand and set it on the desk beside the man in case he got sick again.

"I can't leave yet. That girl still needs me," Hannibal explained seriously, leaning Will back again so he could start stitching at his skin.

"We can't stay here. More of them are going to come after us," Will argued without much bite to his words.

He inhaled sharply as the needle was pushed into him. His eyes watered and he glanced towards the door as their youngest son stumbled through it, carrying far too much for what they had all gone through. Morgan set everything down where Hannibal indicated and then rushed back out of the room.

"He's going to have a break down if he keeps pushing himself like that," Will warned, only receiving a nod from Hannibal. "You understand why we can't stay," Will pushed on. "Even if that girl is still-" Will moaned at a jab that seemed a little harsher than the rest. "Hannibal, we can't stay."

"I can't disappear on her." Hannibal gave a sigh as he tied off the last stitch. "Can you shift a little so that I can get your back?" Will altered himself a bit and Hannibal went to work stitching up the exit wound. "Let me see her through one last thing and we can leave."

"Hannibal," Will stated firmly. He opened his mouth to speak but another wave of nausea came over him and he grabbed onto the bin, giving Hannibal enough warning to stop watching for Will to be sick. "This place is not safe for the boys, and you know it." Will placed the bin aside and tried to breathe deeply through the pain as Hannibal continued his work. "We need to leave in the morning."

"Where would you like to go this time?" Hannibal asked in surrender. Will was right. The girl wasn't his child, he was just someone he felt a roundabout connection to. He had helped her enough. He didn't need to do more for her. He was certain that most of the men that now lay dead were the larger names in the family. It would take time for the family to gather back together and form a new plan. Time they needed to run away. "We have papers for-"

"You promised me Venice," Will said, doing anything to keep his mind on something pleasant.

"I don't know if we should go back to Italy quite yet," Hannibal mumbled, finishing off those stitches and instructing Will to lay down so that Hannibal could clean his side. "Maybe we can go-
"

"Hannibal."

Hannibal gave a nod as he poured more peroxide on Will's wounds. Will swore as Morgan entered the room with Walter behind him, both carrying tubs and bags and more bleach.

"Father," Walter said as he set everything down and made his way to the desk. "What would you like us to do?"

Hannibal paused in his work and glanced over the two boys and what they had brought up and then over the bodies.

"Do not bother with the bodies. I will take care of them in a moment," Hannibal said. "Start with cleaning up the blood. Get it into the buckets and dump them in the tub in the bathroom when

they're full. We'll start in this room and work our way downstairs. I'll help as soon as I'm done with your dad."

Walter nodded and walked over to where Morgan stood, staring. He knelt to Morgan's height and took his shoulders.

"Look at me Morgan," Walter whispered, calling the boy's dull eyes to his face. "You do not have to help. Do you understand?"

"But-"

"You do *not* have to help," Walter repeated strongly. "If you want to sit there, you can sit there, and I will take care of this. Is that what you want?" Morgan gave a nod in answer and Walter pushed Morgan towards the desk. "Go sit behind there so you don't have to see anymore."

Morgan did as instructed and Hannibal stepped aside, letting the small boy hide under his desk, curled up in a ball.

The room was silent after that, filled with only gasps from Will and the sound of rags soaking up blood and being rung out into the bucket.

The night was long, Hannibal and Walter taking care of nearly everything, Hannibal forcing Will to stay still, resting. Will sat on the floor, back against the wall, a silent Morgan laying in his lap, Will playing with Morgan's hair as the silence continued.

"Will," Hannibal said after what could have been several hours of scrubbing on hands and knees. "Go get you and Morgan washed up. Walter and I will take care of this."

Will gave a small nod and pushed Morgan to his feet, getting up himself. Walter watched as Will's body swayed slightly, but he stayed upright, guiding the younger boy from the room.

"Take a rest, Walter," Hannibal instructed. "You're bleeding through your bandages." Walter shook his head, breathing labored in his mask as he continued to scrub at the floor with bleach. "Walter Johnathan Graham," Hannibal said sternly, though Walter didn't let up. “I will not repeat myself.”

"You haven't even looked at your face and taken care of yourself. I am still pumping adrenaline, I won't be able to sit still even though I want to," Walter argued, voice harsh as he scrubbed. "We are going to be working on this for hours. You are not doing it alone. I am here, through the blood and the sugar."

Hannibal paused in his cleaning and looked over at his son who moved forward a bit in his scrubbing, pouring bleach across the floor, the scrub brush making a scratching sound as he pushed on.

"You need help moving the bodies too. You can't do all of this alone and isn't this what you have been training us for?" Walter asked, not bothering to look up at his father’s eyes that were digging into him. “Dad isn’t going to be able to help you and Morgan is too far lost in his own head to be of any further help.” Walter gave a sigh, pausing in his work, the burn in his arms unreal. “Plus, you told me I had choices. This is my choice. I am here to help, so use me before I break into pieces, because I can only stay strong a while longer, Father.”

Walter met his father's eyes that held a small portion of surprise in them. Hannibal gave a deep, resigned sigh and a single nod. "Alright, Walter."

"What are we doing with the bodies? Are they going to your room?"

"Yes," Hannibal answered, wiping at his brow with his forearm. "I will need to take care of them in the morning."

"When are we leaving?" Walter pushed himself up onto his feet and glanced around the room trying to find if there was any other blood they had missed. He knew once they moved the bodies there was going to be more to clean up, but for the most part it looked like everything was pristinely clean.

"Leaving?" Hannibal asked as he rose to his own feet, looking over the room as well. "We'll start with the one closest to the door. Then the two in the downstairs hall before returning here."

"Ok." Walter nodded and moved over to the man closest to the door, watching as Hannibal hoisted the man up and over his shoulder like a sack of flower, Walter feeling useless as he tried to grab the man's legs in hope of bearing some of the weight of the German. "And leaving," Walter continued, voice strained under the weight. "We're going to be moving again, won't we?"

"Yes."

It was straightforward. Hannibal wasn't one to beat around the bush. He was always honest, brutally so, but it was needed. No sugar coating, something that needed to be heard and said outright.

"Can we go somewhere that I can speak the language this time?" Walter gave a small laugh as they trudged down the hall, Walter thinking he was probably hindering Hannibal more than he was helping, but the man didn't say anything against Walter.

"Like where?"

"I'm good at Italian. I know you won't go back to Lithuania," Walter answered. "And I like Italy."

"That seems to be the popular opinion," Hannibal muttered, shifting the body just slightly to get a better grip on it.

"Why didn't we use the dumbwaiter?" Walter questioned, causing Hannibal to pause in his step before pushing on. "It goes down to the training room."

"Do you want to try to shove a body into that little space that you and Morgan barely fit in and then clean up all of the blood that's going to be in it?" Hannibal asked back.

"Not really," Walter said, cautiously searching out for the first step of the stairs with his toes before finding the drop and starting down them.

"Great idea otherwise, *mangustėl*," Hannibal praised quickly, allowing time for Walter to reach the bottom of the stairs before continuing onto the next set of stairs they needed to take. "Just make sure you think through every possibility, every outcome."

Walter was more than helpful until they reached the still unlocked door to Hannibal's private room, the one that made Walter's blood run cold. One he wished he hadn't needed to step into so much so

that he stopped walking.

“You don’t have to go back in, Walter,” Hannibal said as he came to a stop to glance back at Walter. “You don’t-”

“Show me,” Walter said after a moment. “I need to understand.”

“Walter-”

“Show me,” Walter pushed, walking again.

Without a word, Hannibal started on and into the cramped hall and into the rest of the room. Walter let himself be led away towards that large glass frosted room. Walter watched as Hannibal opened the door and stepped in, pulling the body from Walter’s grip, and disappearing inside of it. Walter hesitantly stepped over to the door and glanced inside, curiosity winning out in him.

He stared at a body that was already there, hanging from another hook in the ceiling, skin pale and covered in a thin ice. “Who is this?” Walter questioned as Hannibal lowered the body into the corner, making sure it was laid out straight. Walter shivered, wrapping his arms around himself, watching as his breath hung deadly in the air.

“No one you need to concern yourself with,” Hannibal answered. He glanced over the man in the corner, and satisfied with the body placement, turned back to Walter who was shivering in the cold room. “You ready to get the next one?”

“What are you going to do with them in the morning?”

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“Morgan?” Will asked as he stepped back into his bathroom, looking towards the still going shower. Will placed the towel on the counter and went towards the shower, opening the frosted glass door to find his son cuddling in a corner of the shower. “Morgan, look at me.”

Morgan’s head raised up from his arms and he looked over Will, heart pounding dully in his ears. “I-I-I...” Morgan stuttered, blinking in the spray from the shower, over his dad who had done his best to wash the blood off him in the sink, but was still covered and in need of a shower himself.

Morgan’s hands shook as he remembered the way the gun recoiled in his hand as he shot it. The world felt so far away, and Morgan couldn’t seem to push through the drowning feeling in his stomach. Everything was slow, foggy, except for that moment that replayed over and over again.

The body dropping to the floor. A man’s body falling to the ground after being shot by him. A body, lifeless and on the ground. A body bleeding out, gasping as blood trailed from their lips. A body like his mother’s.

Eyes wide and unseeing as they stared back at him. Dress painted red instead of the lovely summer flowers it had been. Chest heaving, tears running down her cheeks. A weak smile as a hand tried to wipe blood from his face.

He had always imagined what had happened after they had been hid in the closet. The same two men who took care of him now barged into the room and took out the others in the room in a bloody ballet, each death graceful and final. The same blood-stained face that stared back at him now.

“I killed someone!” Morgan blurted out, the words finally ringing through his head, no longer lost in the fog. His breathing doubled and his hands went to his head, red flowing through the bottom of the shower and into the drain. A never ending red though the water was clear and had been for quite a while. “I killed-I killed someone.”

“Shh,” Will shushed, going and fetching the towel from the counter. He turned off the shower and reached down, scooping the boy up and into his arms, ignoring the pain in his arms and back and the weakness there. He pressed Morgan’s head into his neck, holding him tightly. “It’s alright, Morgan. Everything is alright.”

“But I...” Morgan trailed off as he gasped for air, his lungs not wanting to hold onto any of it that he tried to pull in.

“Morgan, I need you to focus on your breathing,” Will instructed, stepping over to the counter and placing Morgan on top of it, wrapping the towel around the boy a little firmer. “Slow your breathing.” Will’s hands took Morgan’s face and watched as the boy tried to do what was asked of him, a long inhale in. “Good, Morgan. Let it out slowly.” Morgan obeyed. “Morgan, you need to listen very carefully to me when I explain this to you.” Will brushed the boy’s wet hair from his face and picked up the pjs he had grabbed for Morgan to wear, starting to dress the boy. “You did nothing wrong. Those men were going to hurt you and you defended yourself. I need you to understand that.”

“They’re dead,” Morgan’s voice was loud and echoed around the bathroom.

“Morgan, you did nothing wrong. You did exactly what your father and I have been teaching you to do. This is the whole reason that we have been teaching you everything we have been. You must be able to keep yourself safe.” Will gave a small sigh, looking over the now dressed Morgan who was still shaking, dark eyes wide like Alana’s had been. “And Walter might not always be there to protect you. You have to take care of yourself, and you did so brilliantly.”

“Dad...” Morgan’s eyes flickered around the room as if they didn’t know where to settle and Will caressed the boy’s face. “Dad, I don’t like this feeling.”

“It’ll fade,” Will assured, voice soft and kind.

“I feel like there’s something tying my insides into knots. I want to scream and throw up and hide. I killed two people Dad. I-I can’t take that back. I can’t change that. I can’t-”

“Morgan,” Will interrupted once more, calling those wandering eyes to his. “I know it feels strange and it will feel strange.” He leaned over and placed a kiss to Morgan’s forehead. “And it’s hard to see you go through it so young, but you have to let it go. You can’t hold onto the feeling. It will destroy you if you hold onto it.”

“I’m not going to feel like this ever again. I’m not going to feel weak and terrified anymore,” Morgan said decidedly. “I don’t want to be a burden.”

“You’re not a burden,” Will contradicted. “You have never been a burden, Morgan.” He lowered Morgan from the counter and onto the floor, guiding the boy from the bathroom and into his own bedroom. “You’re sleeping here tonight.”

“But father-”

“Your father will not mind,” Will stated strongly. “Get in.” Morgan climbed up onto the large bed and Will pulled back the covers and sheets. Morgan settled down into the pillows and Will tucked him in. “I am going to take a shower. I will keep the door open. Come get me if you need something, alright?” Morgan gave a small nod. “You worked so hard, and both your father and I are very proud of you. You do not need to be afraid anymore. You’re safe, you didn’t do anything wrong, and we love you.”

Will moved back into the bathroom and removed his bandages before stepping into the shower and scrubbing the blood from his body. Once dry, rebandaged to the best of his ability and dressed, Will left the room to find Morgan fast asleep. He gave a small, half smile and slowly left the room to go find where Hannibal and Walter were.

Will stepped back into the study and found it nearly empty, save for both his husband and son scrubbing the last of the blood from the floor, the hallway already cleaned. Hannibal looked up at the movement and Will was met with a still bloodied face and a tired expression.

“You’re supposed to be resting,” Hannibal said, causing Will to roll his eyes. “How are you feeling?”

Walter stopped and looked up at Will, expression hidden behind a mask to protect him from the overwhelmingly strong smell of bleach. The boy was battered, bloodied and dirty. His arms shook as he worked, and Will could see how desperately tired he was in his dark eyes. Eyes that looked like they were about to start crying, strength completely spent and emotions storming inside of him.

“I hurt,” Will answered. “But I expect nothing less. Walter, go take a shower and get ready for bed. I will help finish this up.”

“But I-”

“Walter,” Will stated a little stronger. “Go get cleaned up. You have done more than enough for tonight. Come to our room when you’re done.”

Walter glanced over to Hannibal who gave a small nod, telling Walter to obey. Walter slowly rose to his feet, Will watching as his knees trembled in their attempt to hold him up. Waler moved for the door, but Will stopped him, pulling him into a hug.

“I love you, Walter.”

“I love you too, Dad,” he whispered in a broken voice.

Will released him and watched the boy leave down the hall, pulling the mask from his face, before turning back to where Hannibal had begun scrubbing again. Will stepped over, lowering himself to his knees beside Hannibal, watching his muscles work in his forearms as he scrubbed.

“You would hurt me if I tried to help you, wouldn’t you?” Will asked softly.

“You lift a single finger,” Hannibal threatened, not needing to finish the threat for Will to understand.

“Is this all you have left?” Will glanced over the small bit of red that still decorated the floor in an inky puddle that had been mostly cleaned up.

“Yes.” Hannibal sat back on his heels and gave a deep exhale, the age beginning to show in his face a little more, a tiredness etched into his skin. “For tonight anyway.”

“How are you feeling?” Wil asked gently, wishing he could reach out, but knowing better than to try to touch Hannibal at the moment. He wanted to work and Will knew not to get in Hannibal’s way when there was work. Especially this type of work. “Your face looks-”

“I will be alright. My face is the only thing injured thankfully,” Hannibal said, going back to his scrubbing. “How is Morgan?”

“Asleep. He had a breakdown in the shower.”

“He did kill two people,” Hannibal muttered, moving onto the very last section of the study. “I would expect him to have nightmares for a long while.”

“They’re good boys, Hannibal. They’ve gone through so much the last few days...” Will trailed off. “They deserve something.”

“Something like what?” Hannibal asked. “Like a trip? A dog? What?”

“I don’t know.” Will ran a hand through his curls and winced at the stiffness in his shoulder. “Maybe we ask them what they want.”

Hannibal gave a small nod. “Alright. One thing each, whatever they want. You’re right. They deserve it.”

Hannibal scooped up the scrub brush and bucket and placed them aside, deciding to deal with those in the morning, far too spent to try to do anymore tonight. He pulled Will to his feet and carefully looked over his husband.

“You need to be in bed. You’re going to make yourself sick. You lost a good amount of blood.”

“Hannibal, stop fretting over me,” Will said with a smile. “You’ve done more than enough for us tonight as well. Let’s get you showered and your face cleaned up and get to bed. We have a lot to do tomorrow.”

Hannibal gave a nod and let Will pull him along back through the now clean and empty house, to their bedroom. Hannibal gave an odd look to find their youngest asleep in their bed but didn’t question it. Just went into the bathroom to shower.

Will left the room and checked all the door and the windows, making sure each one was locked tight before heading back upstairs, running into Walter in the hallway. Walter looked to be barely awake on his feet and was stumbling. Will guided him back towards his own room, closing the bedroom door behind them and locking it as well, still not feeling perfectly safe, but better.

“Get into bed,” Will instructed.

That seemed to wake Walter up from whatever half sleep he had been in. He looked over at Will with wide and questioning eyes. “But Father-”

“Shh,” Will hushed, pulling his son to him in a tight hug, careful of the boy’s back. “You’re always so worried about what Father will do to you. Have you not learned that he cares about you?”

“I know who he is when he’s angry,” Walter answered in a calm voice. “And I do not want to be on the other side of that emotion.”

“Has your father ever done anything to harm you?” Will asked, stroking the boy’s hair. Walter shook his head. “And I can count on one hand the amount of times he has raised his voice at you. Has he ever been unkind or unfair to you?” Again, Walter shook his head. “Then stop being afraid of him. He loves you.” Will released Walter and nodded towards the bed. “Try not to wake Morgan.” Walter did as instructed, climbing in and under the covers beside Morgan, leaving Will to go to the bathroom.

He stepped into the steam filled room to find Hannibal at the counter, looking in the mirror at his cheek that had several decently deep gashes in it. He was carefully applying butterfly stitches to his skin, the cuts not deep enough to need real stitching.

“Are you alright?” Will asked.

Hannibal stood upright and gave a nod, checking the mirror once more before turning to Will and motioning him from the bathroom. “Get into bed, Will,” Hannibal instructed. “You should be off of your feet.”

Will left the bathroom and did as told, climbing into the bed beside Morgan and carefully pulling the small boy against his body, free hand reaching out and taking Walter’s.

Hannibal looked over the scene for a moment before getting dressed. He made sure all the curtains were closed tightly so that the sun that was beginning to rise didn’t come into the room. They needed the rest. All of them. Sleep was a good healer and Hannibal was going to let them all sleep as long as they needed to.

Hannibal turned off the bathroom light, immersing the room into a comfortable darkness before finding his way to his bed and climbing into it. He could feel the heat of Walter’s body beside him as he moved in closer to be beside his family.

Hannibal closed his eyes with a sign settling in, shocked when he felt Walter’s free hand that wasn’t wrapped up in Will’s, reach for him, calling him closer. Hannibal hesitated for a moment, unsure of exactly what Walter wanted, but moved closer to his son, hugging the boy tightly against him, other hand instinctively going out and finding Morgan’s hand to hold onto.

They were all there, all safe, all whole. They were all aching and tired and physically and emotionally raw, but at least they were all together once more. A family.

Chapter End Notes

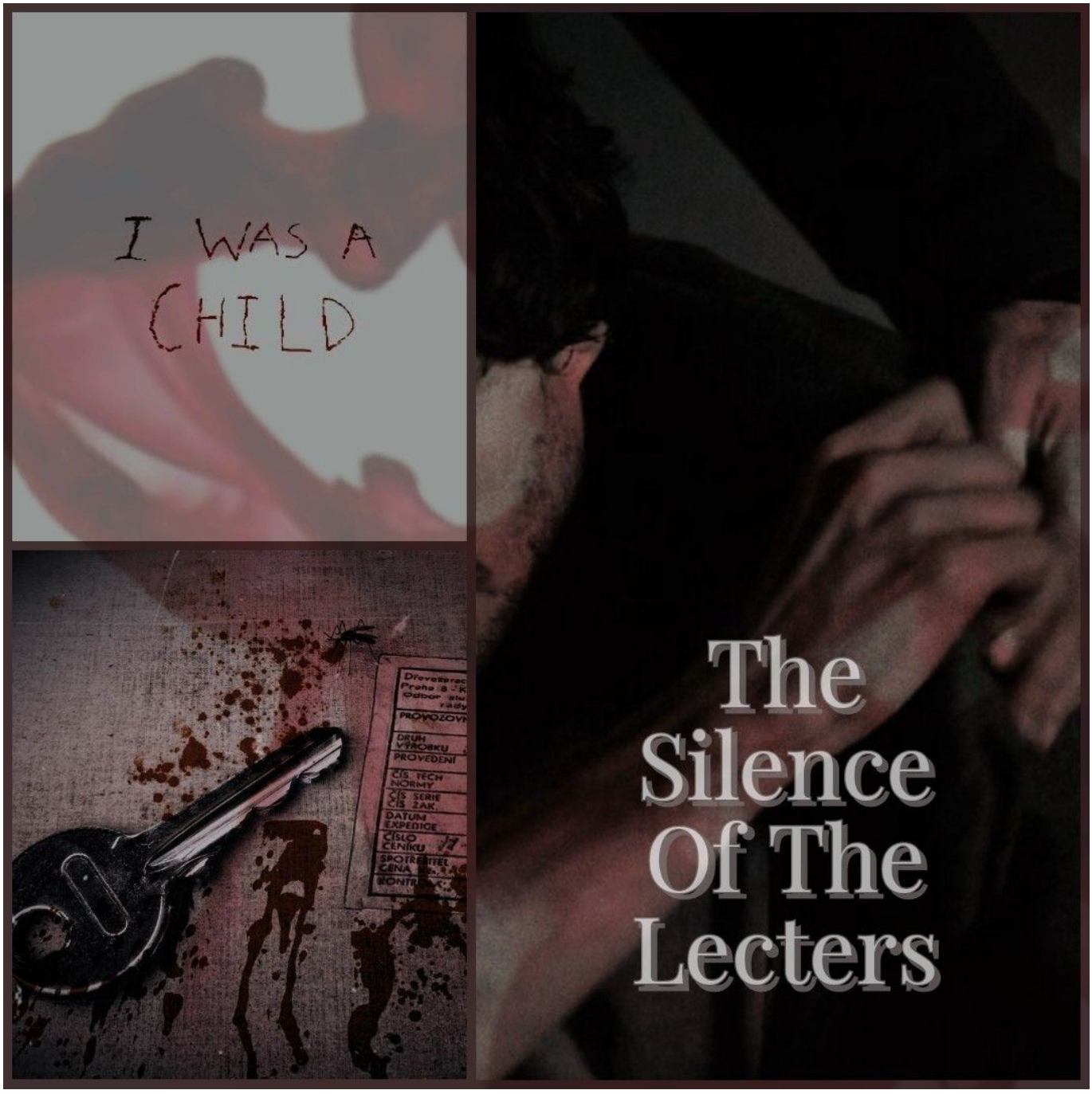
I'm so sorry for the long break between everything. I feel like I have lived a thousand lives in the span of a few months and it took its toll. I've lost more than a lot and I'm not sure how to put it all back together, but I promise going forward to make sure my uploads are as regular as

I can make them. I have lost a lot of steam for this story, but i promise it will be finished. I've met a lot of people who have helped me realize a lot of things that have helped me grow greatly and I will do my best to keep pushing myself to be better. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I hope the length makes up for the time I've been absent. Thank you all for your continued support. All of my love.

# Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

It was unhealthy. It was dangerous. It was... beautiful. Walter frowned at the idea, something so twisted that it was normal for him. Something that he thought was perfect. Two people so desperately in love with each other that they would do anything for each other and themselves. And maybe that wasn’t love, but maybe he didn’t really know what love was. Because as far as Walter was concerned, love was destruction, breathtaking in its many flaws.




Walter woke up in darkness and sat up in a bed that wasn't his, the sheets far softer than his own. But Morgan was beside him as normal and through the darkness he could make out the outline of his dad, both still fast asleep. But Hannibal was missing.

Walter slowly got to his feet, knees weak under him, sleep still digging into his bones and begging him to lay back into the thousand thread count sheets. But he ignored the feelings and went to the windows, pulling back the curtains just enough to look out. It was dark outside, and Walter wondered if it had only been a few hours since he had fallen asleep or if he had slept the day away, very contrary to Father's rule of the sun being up so the house needed to be up.

Walter left the bedroom and found his way through several hallways and to the stairs. Hitting the bottom step, Walter could make out the scent of coffee and something cooking. He made his way into the kitchen and found Hannibal, sweater sleeves pushed up to his elbows as he cut up into see through thin slices and then cubes of what Walter recognized as prosciutto. Or what he wanted to believe was prosciutto, what he was going to go to his grave believing was prosciutto.

Hannibal looked up from his work, one cheek having several steri-strips holding together gashes from the rings that had been on that man's hand. His nose was bruised across the bridge where a previous scar already sat.

"You should still be sleeping," Hannibal announced, eyes lowering back to his knife work. "You need more rest than your dad and I do. You went through a lot."

"I'm fine," Walter assured, moving to the counter and taking a seat at one of the bar chairs.

"You are handling it better than I thought you would," Hannibal admitted, wiping his hands on a towel that was over his shoulder. He picked up several different wedges of cheese and placed them on the counter beside Walter along with a cheese grater and a bowl. Walter reached out and picked up the first wedge of cheese and peeled at the plastic that was sealing it shut. "I thought you would be reacting a bit more like Morgan did."

"The way that I see it," Walter started with a deep breath, dragging the cheese down the grater, "what happened is what happened. I can't change my actions, there's no reason in letting my emotions get the better of me."

"You did kill two men," Hannibal pointed out, setting the thinly sliced meat aside, not before handing a slice to Walter to eat. Walter placed the ham in his mouth and immediately realized just how hungry he really was. Hannibal then grabbed a fresh cantaloupe and cut it in half with a single slice of his knife.

"They would have killed us." Walter wrapped up the slice of cheese and moved onto the next wedge. "I thought you, of all people, would be proud of what we did."

"I didn't want to come off as the monster the world likes to paint me as," Hannibal stated in a slightly pained voice as he continued to work. "I don't want my children to be afraid of the monster that I am. But I am proud of you."

There was a silence that fell through the kitchen, the two working on whatever Hannibal had planned for dinner or breakfast or whatever meal this was. Walter wasn't sure, and he didn't really care. Anything Hannibal cooked would be perfectly perfect and that's all Walter wanted.

"Tell me what was wrong with the soup," Hannibal said after a moment. The fruit was cut and covered and placed aside and now on the counter was a large amount of flour that Hannibal was turning into a small dam to hold eggs in the middle of. Pasta. Something light and easy to eat after what they had been through.

"Salty."

"Is that what gave it away?"

Walter paused in the grating of the multitude of cheeses and looked around the kitchen, eyes landing on the old glass coffee maker that Hannibal liked to use. Something from the 1800's if

Will's comments about how ridiculous the contraption was were anything to go by.

"Can I have a cup of coffee?" Walter asked, watching as Hannibal cracked an egg into the center of the flour volcano.

"Are you old enough for a cup of coffee?" Hannibal asked back. "Your dad would not approve."

"I killed two men. I think I am old enough to have a cup of coffee," Walter challenged.

"Very well," Hannibal receded without so much as a fight much to Walter's surprise. Even if Hannibal had said that Walter was free to make his own choices and Will had told him to challenge everything, he hadn't thought that his parents, his father above everything else, would bow out of the way so easily. "Just turn the handle to the left."

Walter lowered himself from the bar chair to the floor and went over to the machine, looking over it curiously, it reminded him of some weird beakers set that a mad scientist would have. Walter took one of the small glass mugs and filled it up, heading back to his seat.

"I would suggest a little cream or sugar," Hannibal offered, glancing up from the dough he was kneading. Walter gave a small shrug and took a sip of the drink, it hot and bitter like dirt over his tongue. He winced and was met with a knowing smile from Hannibal. "Just because we want you to start to question our authority does not mean that my advice has lessened in value."

Walter pushed his cup across the counter to Hannibal who wiped his hands off and took the cup over to the fridge to add a bit of cream and then to the pantry to add a cube of sugar. He stirred it with a small spoon before placing it back in front of Walter.

Walter took a hesitant sip and was pleasantly surprised at how much better it tasted. "It's perfect," he muttered, receiving a small airy laugh from Hannibal. "Like everything you make, it's perfect. That's how I knew. You wouldn't make something that wasn't perfect."

"I wouldn't?" Hannibal asked curiously.

"You're too much of a narcissist," Walter answered, watching as Hannibal paused for a moment, nothing longer, before going back to his work. "Father?"

"Yes, Walter?"

"I want to help you today."

Hannibal placed the pasta in the fridge to let it set and turned back around, cleaning up the cheeses that Walter had finished grating for him. "Help me?" Hannibal asked, unsure if he wanted to know exactly what Walter meant.

"Take care of the bodies," Walter clarified. "You're going to need help today just like you needed last night or however long ago this happened. I don't want to know what day it is." Hannibal leaned against the counter with his arms folded. "Dad can't help you. He needs to rest. Morgan can't be anywhere near that and like it or not, you need me. I'm here to help."

"I do not want your help, Walter."

Stern. Decided. Final.

Walter frowned and drank a little more of the coffee, it somehow made him feel a bit older than he really was. A stronger version of himself that could stand up to Hannibal. Did alcohol do the same? It was called liquid courage for a reason, wasn't it?

"This is something I need to do, need to learn."

"No." Hannibal shook his head. "It's not. And I am not going to let you. Your dad would have my head on a spike."

"You're scared of Dad?" Walter asked, tipping his head to the side, the sentence strange in his mouth. Hannibal wasn't scared of anything. Hannibal was the creature that went bump in the night. Hannibal was the monster that everything else was afraid of. Hannibal was a god with absolute command of his surroundings and he... wasn't scared of anything. Was he? "There's no reason for you to be afraid of Dad."

"You and Morgan are the reason that I am afraid of your dad," Hannibal explained, returning to cleaning up the kitchen as they waited for the pasta dough to continue to set. "Your dad is the embodiment of Jekyll and Hyde. He is the most docile person until you are involved and then he can become the evilest creature, devoid of any compassion or remorse. I do not wish to ever be on the other side of his Mr. Hyde."

Walter was quiet, finger tracing the edge of his cup as he took in the words. Hannibal wasn't wrong, though Walter had never put much of a thought to it. And the more he thought about how protective Wil was over the two of them, the more he realized just how far Will was willing to go for them.

Walter was certain now that watching Will stab that man over and over again had not been some fevered dream or manifestation of pain from being shot. Will really had killed that man to protect them. He had been around Will killing before, but never with an anger like that.

"Think of it as a bonding experience. Show me what the famous Chesapeake Ripper and *Il Mostro di Firenze* can do. Show me why people should be terrified of you, Hannibal," Walter taunted with a smile.

Hannibal frowned at the name. "Don't call me that. And the answer is still no, especially now."

Walter gave a small laugh. "I'm sorry, Father. You're just so easy to upset. It's funny."

"Your manipulation isn't funny, Walter."

"It's what you've taught me," Walter pointed out, resting his chin in his hand boredly. "I need to understand you."

"Why are you suddenly so interested in my work?" Hannibal's hands took the counter and he leaned across it towards Walter. "You've never been so demanding before."

"You gave me agency to think for myself," Walter pointed out. "I've been doing a lot of thinking. I've..." Walter trailed off, gaze lowering under the burn from Hannibal's. He was silent for a moment in thought. "I've always been malicious in a sense. I begged Will to kill the man you sent after my mom and me. Told him a hospital wasn't good enough."

“Did Will ever tell you that he did kill him?” Hannibal asked, pushing himself from the counter and picking up his own, unfinished, cup of coffee to take a sip. Walter’s eyes were wide as he looked up and the boy shook his head. “It was-”

“Beautiful,” a voice interrupted from the doorway to the kitchen. Walter turned to look at Will, who had his arms folded and Walter winced, curious how long his dad had been listening to their conversation.

“Go back to bed, Will,” Hannibal instructed, cup going back to the counter. “You need to be resting. Your back-”

“I’m fine,” Will insisted, giving Walter a small sense of relief. He hadn’t been there for long, hadn’t heard the things he had been saying to Hannibal, rather rudely. “Let Walter help you.”

Walter froze, eyes wide and flicking over his dad who had never let Walter near anything of the sort before. Will had always been so careful with Walter. Walter could remember the Witch Hunter’s case vividly.

The way Wil had made him stay close after he had found those bodies. The way Will made him stay inside of the house, away from Jordan and Casey, but far enough out of line that he couldn’t see the murders. And then after, when Jordan and Casey had attacked him and his mother, Will didn’t let Walter see what he had done. The blindfold had stayed on until Walter was outside of his grandparent’s house. And after that when Margot and Alana were attacked, Will had hid them away, made sure that they didn’t see anything, kept them safe and as innocent as he could. What had changed now?

“I'm sorry?” Hannibal asked in place of Walter who felt just the same amount of shock in his system as what Hannibal had allowed into his voice.

“I can’t help you,” Will supplied. “And I am going to have to take care of Morgan when he wakes up. This is more than one body; you can’t do it alone.”

“I am perfectly capable of-”

“Hannibal,” Will stated resolutely, wrapping an arm around Walter’s shoulders, and causing Walter to want to squirm out of the strong grip. Not because it hurt, but because it implied that Will was going to get his way, just as he always got his way. Hannibal was helpless against Will and Walter knew it, saw it daily. Even in the little things, not just the big things.

If Will wasn’t pleased with a meal, which was rare, Hannibal would make him something else, no questions asked. Morgan and Walter had to eat what was given to them. If Will saw something in the newspaper he liked, or mentioned wanting something it would appear within the next day or two without another prompting. Morgan and Walter had to save what little money they had to purchase anything that they didn’t outright need. Hannibal didn’t splurge on them, but he did on Will. That was how Will had gotten his car, something very nice and very unneeded as Will didn’t often leave the house unless it was to wander the grounds. If Will decided he wanted to go somewhere, Hannibal whisked him away. Granted, he always took Walter and Morgan along, but there were nights where they weren’t allowed to go out with their parents, were left to their own devices in the hotel room until Will and Hannibal returned which sometimes wasn’t until the next day.

Will always got exactly what he wanted, when he wanted it, no questions asked. No expense too high. No price tag too much. No request too ludicrous to not be taken care of. But Walter wondered if maybe this one was.

Hannibal's hands became fists and he frowned, eyes downturned to the floor. He inhaled and exhaled deeply, and Walter could see the cogs turning in his father's head. "Why?" Hannibal asked softly, not looking up. "This isn't something the boy needs to be a part of."

Will released Walter's shoulders and stepped around the counter and to Hannibal. Will's hands gently stroked over Hannibal's bare forearm, his other one wrapping around Hannibal's waist. He placed a calculated kiss to Hannibal's cheek, something soft, but Walter knew it was coaxing Hannibal into giving Will what he had asked for.

The kiss moved from Hannibal's cheek and to the man's jaw. Walter looked away for a moment, before his eyes flickered back to his parents. They had never been shy with their affection like Will had been with Molly. Walter couldn't exactly remember Will and his mother kissing more than a quick peck now and then, a light touch to an arm sometimes. Nothing like how Hannibal and Will were. Unashamed in their love.

Will's hand took Hannibal's cheek and pulled the man's face up so that Will could kiss him, still soft, still persuading and Walter watched as his father's shoulders visibility relaxed, giving in like he always did, surrendering to the only person in the entire world that could make him submit. But Will wasn't done. He always gave back, even if it was small. Will was never ungrateful.

"I will go back to bed and rest if you let Walter help you," Will offered, dragging Hannibal into his manipulation. Because that's really what it was, wasn't it? What Walter had shoved down his throat for the last two years? You control. You break down the other person, use fear, obligation, and guilt to get exactly what you want. Promise everything, take everything instead.

Say anything to get exactly what was wanted. Do anything to get what was yours. Use other people as your pavers to make your own path. But never lies. Right or wrong, there were never lies.

And Hannibal was just the same. Took as much from Will as he wanted as what Will took from him.

Hannibal had control. He told Will what to do, what to wear, and sometimes was unreasonably jealous when it came to Will's attention being more focused on Walter or Morgan, but Hannibal never said anything against it. Will always returned to him.

Hannibal was hostile at times. He enjoyed picking fights with Will, antagonizing him. There were never full-blown arguments. At least, not many that Walter could remember, only over the important things, not the petty things that Hannibal liked to bring up. Will could brush off Hannibal's attempts gracefully.

And there was the codependency. That was between both, just as aggressive on both sides, an excessive emotional and psychological reliance on each other. Neither of them were able to be away from the other for more than a day or two without crumbling. And they had never really been separated. Not since they had all run away together.

It was unhealthy. It was dangerous. It was... beautiful. Walter frowned at the idea, something so twisted that it was normal for him. Something that he thought was perfect. Two people so desperately in love with each other that they would do anything for each other and themselves. And

maybe that wasn't love, but maybe he didn't really know what love was. Because as far as Walter was concerned, love was destruction, breathtaking in its many flaws.

"Go back to bed. I'll come check on you and Morgan in a bit," Hannibal instructed before he kissed Will once more, something deeper that made Walter shift in his chair and look down at his empty coffee cup.

Will pulled back with a small nod and released his grip on his husband. He walked back around the counter and his hand took the back of Walter's head, calling Walter's attention to him. He placed a kiss to Walter's head, whispering, "You do exactly as your father instructs you. He will keep you safe."

"Safe?" Walter asked curiously, but Will didn't answer. He simply released Walter and left the kitchen, his footsteps disappearing up the stairs. "You give into him too easily," Walter pointed out and Hannibal only nodded. "Why do you?"

"Because most of the time he's right," Hannibal answered in a small voice. "Let me look over your stitches and then help me make the pasta. We'll eat and then if you still want to know what I do, I will show you."

"Show me everything?" Walter questioned, turning in his chair for Hannibal to better see the bandages around his middle.

"Everything."

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"Where's Wally?" Morgan asked when he had woken.

Will inhaled deeply, pulling himself from a light doze that he had agreed to go into just to please Hannibal. Will reached out a hand and stoked back some of the boy's dark hair. "He's with your father," Will answered in a whisper, unsure if he could make his voice go any louder. He felt weak and sick and tired, but he couldn't let the boys see that. He had to be strong for them. "How are you feeling?"

"Empty," Morgan answered without skipping a beat. "But that's better than being scared."

The words were cold in the way they were said as if the young boy had been upset with himself for feeling a normal reaction. Will's fingers continued to play with the boy's hair and he sighed. Morgan was different now. Will knew the moment that Morgan pulled that trigger the boy would be different, but he didn't think that it would be such a sharp turn off of emotions.

"Would you-"

"I'm hungry," Morgan stated, sitting up. "I'm going to get something to eat." Morgan pulled from the bed and Will let the boy go, his body in far too much pain to go after him. Morgan stopped at the edge of the bed and glanced back at Will. "Dad, whatever Wally tells you about what happened this weekend, don't believe him. I didn't do anything to help him. He's the reason we made it back. I panicked. But it won't happen again. I want you to take me on a trip next weekend. Us two. I need to pay better attention."

"We don't need to rush into anything," Will tried to assure, but Morgan simply shook his head, going for the door.

“Morgan,” a new voice said at the door. Will rolled onto his back with a wince and an exhale through his teeth. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” Morgan answered Hannibal’s question.

“Will you go help your brother with the food? He’s just finishing up the pasta.”

“Alright.”

There were retreating footsteps and then footsteps leading to the bed. Hannibal sat down on the edge and a hand reached out, brushing back Will’s curls. Will gave a small smile and closed his eyes, relaxing into the gentle hold.

“I should probably cut my hair,” Will said, voice still not above a whisper.

“I like it long.”

“You just like having something to pull on when I’m disobeying you.” Will smiled at a teasing tug on his locks. “I’m sorry for what I said in the kitchen. I just like to push you sometimes.”

“You’re not wrong,” Hannibal said, getting from the bed and heading for the bathroom. He turned on the lights and dug through one of the cabinets for some painkillers. “Walter needs to learn. I just didn’t think that he would need to learn it this early.” Finding the bottle that Hannibal wanted, he returned to the room. “I just want to...”

“Keep them innocent?” Will suggested, opening his eyes to find Hannibal sitting back down. He opened the pill bottle and poured out a single pill, holding it out in an open palm. “I don’t want any more medicine, Hannibal. I couldn’t do anything when those people attacked us. I don’t want to feel vulnerable like that again.”

“Children shouldn’t know the ways of the world this early in life. It’s not fair to them,” Hannibal agreed, hand still outheld. “It’s codeine. It will help with the pain. And I will be here this time.”

Will shook his head, hand reaching out and closing Hannibal’s hand around the pill. “I don’t want my mind to be foggy again, Hannibal.”

“This is one time you don’t get to fight me. I will make you take it if I have to Will,” Hannibal warned. “This time being a doctor comes before being your submissive husband.”

“You wouldn’t,” Will said with a small laugh, receiving a raised brow from Hannibal in challenge. “The only thing I am going to be putting in my mouth is whatever you are cooking and you wouldn’t drug my food. It would ruin the dish.”

“Will.”

Will shook his head and Hannibal frowned.

Will watched curiously as Hannibal pulled his hand free from Will’s and tipped his palm against his mouth. Hannibal leaned over Will and placed a kiss to Will’s lips, hand quickly plugging Will’s nose and tongue forcing its way between Will’s lips.

He passed the pill into Will’s mouth, not breaking the kiss, other hand resting against Will’s throat to feel him swallow. Once satisfied and his tongue had checked Will’s mouth to make sure he didn’t

hide the pill under his tongue like he liked to do, Hannibal pulled back, leaving Will gasping for air.

“Let me check your stitches, *brangus berniuk,*” Hannibal instructed, receiving a dark glare from Will who was still breathing rather hard, the rising and falling of his chest painful. “We need to clean them and rebandage them, love. Then you can eat and rest.”

“Hannibal.” Will’s tone was sharp.

“Hush, love.” Hannibal placed a gentle kiss to Will’s forehead and then down over the bridge of his nose, feeling the way that Will relaxed beneath him. A tender kiss at the side of Will’s lips and Will sighed. “Let me take care of you.”

“When are we going to start packing?” Will asked when Hannibal pulled away, carefully pulling at the bandages at Will’s shoulder. “We need to leave-”

“Don’t worry your mind over that at the moment,” Hannibal instructed. “I will take care of everything. You just focus on getting better.”

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Dinner was nice. A light prosciutto pasta carbonara that both the boys had helped make. The hour was late, their sleep schedule utterly screwed, but work still needed to be done. Not that Will or Morgan could help. Hannibal rose from his chair at the head of the table when Will lowered his head into his hands, having been absolutely silent through dinner.

“Let’s get you to bed,” Hannibal said softly, helping Will to his feet. Walter glanced up from his food and saw a rather drugged look Will being pulled from the room. “Can you boys clean up his plate please?” Hannibal asked as he left. Hannibal must have given Will something to help with the pain. Walter had been given some Tylenol, nothing stronger despite the ache in his shoulder. Hannibal probably wanted Will to rest and Will definitely needed it.

Morgan got from the table, taking his setting and Will’s to the kitchen to clean it and Walter sighed, taking another bite of the dish, just enjoying the feeling of something more filling than blackberries were.

The TV that was rarely ever on was turned on for Morgan after dinner was cleared, the young boy happily sat in front of it, promising to go to bed after an hour or so. They were all still so tired, so worn, but Walter knew what had to be done and how quickly it needed to be done as well.

Walter followed Hannibal down to the basement and back into Hannibal’s locked room. Walter closed his eyes outside of the room and inhaled deeply, causing Hannibal to pause as he opened the door.

“You don’t have to do this, Walter.”

“I have to understand,” Walter breathed out, a hand going to his head.

“You’re too much like your dad,” Hannibal muttered, turning back to face Walter fully. “You need to understand that some secrets can stay secrets. You don’t have to know all of the answers.”

Walter shook his head. “I need these answers.”

“You won’t like them.”

“I know.” Walter gave a determined nod.

Hannibal inhaled deeply and stepped through the door, leaving it open for Walter to follow. Walter’s steps were small, Hannibal’s large with purpose, disappearing into the freezer before Walter had entered the room.

“We have a lot to work through,” Hannibal stated from the open freezer door that Walter slowly approached. “Normally you would want to drain the bodies before doing this, but we just didn’t have the time. We’re just going to have to clean a bit more than normal.”

“Drain the bodies?” Walter asked, finally looking around the door to see Hannibal pulling the man from the hook, the sucking sound of it leaving flesh sounding like a knife cutting through chicken. Walter swallowed and looked to the ground only to find more frozen faces staring at him.

“Blood gets messy,” Hannibal explained. “You drain it from the body and you can manipulate the body better.”

“And...” Walter’s mouth felt dry. “How did you figure this out?”

Walter looked up when his father’s dress shoes appeared in his vision and came face to face with a serious looking Hannibal. “Practice.” Walter stepped from the freezer, ignoring the chill to his body and closed the freezer door behind Hannibal, following Hannibal over to the band saw that had a rather large table. Hannibal set the man down and Walter moved a little closer, looking over the tool and wondering if Hannibal had it specifically made or if it was something you could just pick up for a butcher’s shop.

“How do you drain the blood?”

Hannibal glanced at Walter over his shoulder, still fighting a small internal war on what he should answer for Walter and what he shouldn’t. “There’s many different ways,” Hannibal settled on. “If you want something fast but messy, you can cut the femoral arteries and perform CPR. The heart will pump the blood, even if the heart is stopped, but I wouldn’t suggest that.”

“What do you do?”

“You take a scalpel and make a small incision near the right collarbone.” Hannibal touched the area he was explaining on himself. “You want the common carotid artery and the internal jugular vein. Make an incision in each. Arterial tubes are placed in the artery directed towards the heart. I would use an embalming machine, it helps regulate the pressure and pushes out the blood through the jugular vein, cleanly and controlled.”

Walter glanced around the room and his eyes stopped on one of the odd machines that he couldn’t exactly place before, something that looked a bit like a blender. There were two knobs on the front as well as some tubing wrapped up beside it. That had to be it.

“And what are we going to do to them?” Walter motioned to the body that was waiting patiently for whatever fate Hannibal had decided for them.

“We’re going to dismember them into very small pieces and spread them out through the forest on our property.”

Walter gave another small nod at Hannibal's answers. He could feel his stomach starting to churn, but he pushed the feeling away. "I thought you liked to create art."

"When I am inspired." Hannibal rubbed at the back of his neck. "We don't have the time for that."

"And you eat them."

Hannibal's eyes met Walter's, feeling a little out of place. Strange. He had never even let Will in this close, Will having never wanted to know. Will was perfectly content to just accept Hannibal, he didn't feel the need to dig into the hows, he just wanted the whys.

Before Hannibal could answer, Walter continued.

"Do you feed us people?"

It was something that Walter had never considered and he wasn't exactly sure he had never considered it before. Wasn't sure where the want to ask the question had come from. Wasn't sure why he blurted it out. Was surprised at the shocked look on Hannibal's face. Did he really want the answer? No, not really, but if Hannibal was anything, it was honest. Always honest.

"Occasionally."

Walter gave yet another nod, accepting. He was just accepting everything that was told to him and Hannibal wasn't sure exactly how to react, what to feel, what else to say. He had never been in such a position before.

"We need to get to work," he finally announced. "Before the body defrosts. It will make it more difficult to clean if we wait."

Walter stepped closer and looked over the body. "Show me."

Hannibal licked his lips and flicked on the saw, it roaring to life. "You don't have-"

"Father, show me."

# Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

"Do I make myself clear?”
There was something in the way the words were said that sucked the air from the room, something that Will still couldn’t exactly seem to copy. A command that demanded absolute respect with an underlying threat that didn’t need to be hinted at.

# The Silence Of The Lecters

“Why does he get to go to a normal school?” Morgan questioned as Walter raced out of the front door after Will who was walking him to school. The door shut and Morgan frowned. Hannibal placed a hand on Morgan’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

“Because he is older and can make his own choices,” Hannibal explained. “When you’re his age we will discuss other options for you if that is what you desire. For now, it is time to start your lessons for the day as well.”

“Will we go back to Germany someday?” Morgan asked as he was led from the front of the villa and to the stone staircase that led up to the attic where the new classroom was. “I miss it.”

“I thought you would enjoy Venice,” Hannibal stated, hand still on Morgan’s shoulder as they entered the smaller space.

“Everything is smaller here,” Morgan grumbled, taking his seat at his desk. “I don’t like the city much. It’s too loud. It’s hard to sleep at night.”

“Even in Walter’s bed?”

Hannibal glanced down at his son’s silence and gave a small tip of his head. He wound himself up to his desk and leaned against the edge of it with his arms folded. Morgan waited quietly, eyes on Hannibal, but no lesson seemed to start. Morgan tipped his head to the side, mirroring Hannibal’s stance and Hannibal gave a small smile.

“If you have nightmares, you are welcome to come to your dad and me,” Hannibal finally said after the silence drew on a little too long. “Walter and you are both growing boys who need sleep. Please come to me if you are having problems sleeping.”

“Yes, sir,” Morgan answered with a nod, embarrassment painting over his cheeks. “I wasn’t aware that you-”

“*Kleiner hase*,” Hannibal interrupted kindly. “Do not think that things go unnoticed in my house. And since when am I Sir, to you?”

“They must have if you haven’t said anything before,” Morgan answered, shifting in his seat, head tipping to the other side.

Hannibal felt his teeth show in a smile at the cheeky comment. “You have traits of Will in you, *kleiner hase.*” Hannibal pushed himself from the desk and moved over to Morgan, kneeling beside his desk. Morgan stared at Hannibal curiously. It was always a surprise to him when Hannibal lowered himself down to Morgan’s level. Morgan had always thought of Hannibal as above him and to always see him eye level when he was a god, made Morgan feel a little out of place. “*kleiner hase*, we need to discuss last weekend.”

“I know I didn’t help like I was asked to and I-”

“No, no, no,” Hannibal quickly interrupted, hand reaching out to take Morgan’s in reassurance. “You do not have to help in those ways if you do not wish. I have asked a lot from you and to expect you to assist in those aspects would be irresponsible of me.”

“Then what do we need to talk about?”

Hannibal gave Morgan's hand a gentle squeeze before he released it. "The soup."

"Oh," Morgan answered with a nod. "You drugged us."

"You didn't notice," Hannibal agreed, getting back to his feet and moving to his desk to sit behind it. "You must always be aware of your surroundings, Morgan. You must always check your food. I know it is a lot to remember and I do not expect you to remember it all and not all of it is important while you are living at home with your dad and me. We will protect you to the best of our abilities, but there will come a day when you have to be on your own and I can't tell you the food is drugged."

"The food was salty," Morgan said with a nod, eyes up in thought. "But you and Dad were eating it just fine so I just thought maybe you had messed up."

"Messed up," Hannibal repeated with a small chuckle. "I do not mess up food. It should have been a big enough hint, Morgan."

Morgan gave a small nod. "I know what they taste like. You've taught me that. I'm not sure what else there is for you to teach me about them. And what if the food really is just overly salty?"

"We're going to start building a tolerance in your body to common sedatives and tranquilizers," Hannibal explained. "It is important that you are not taken off guard again."

"What about Walter?"

"I will discuss it with him when he returns home." Hannibal leaned back in his chair. "He was cautious enough to notice the soup was drugged." Morgan gave a small nod in understanding. "It is important that if you can't avoid being drugged your goal should be to maintain consciousness, feign greater symptoms than you have, and use that as an advantage."

"Pretend to be drugged, even though I'm being drugged?" Morgan asked in confusion. "I don't understand."

"We will build up your tolerance, but you still need to be cautious. You have a smaller frame than Walter does. You will be more affected by drugs than he will be. We need to work on your detection and then if there is something in your food or drink, you need to keep your drugger under the belief that the drug has worked. The idea is to keep them unaware."

"Are you going to be drugging all of my food from now on?"

"No," Hannibal replied with a shake of his head. "We will start slow. Your first test will be right now. We're going to go down to the kitchen and I will make several items. One or more might contain some form of drugs. You will try each one, tell me which ones are drugged and then you should be awake in time for your brother to arrive home."

Morgan blinked several times, taking in the words. "And how often will we do this?"

"Once a day until you are able to identify them."

"And if I know you're drugging everything, then how will I be able to-"

"I will keep you on your toes, son. You do not let your guard down, do you understand?" Hannibal asked, getting from his desk and dismissing the lesson he had planned in leu of this new one.

“Come with me.”

Morgan got from his desk and raced after Hannibal’s long strides, back down the stairs and into the kitchen, sitting when Hannibal instructed him to at the counter bar. He waited for Hannibal to return from the other room and he stared as several bottles were placed onto the counter in front of him.

Morgan reached out and took the first one, looking over it and reading the label. Rohypnol. Morgan glanced up as Hannibal began digging through the fridge for some vegetables.

“This is meant for insomnia,” Morgan said, spinning the bottle to read the back of it. “Is it over the counter?”

“You need a prescription, but it’s not difficult to get your hands on,” Hannibal answered as he went to his knife block, inspecting a knife and, finding it not sharp enough for his liking, went about sharpening it. “It is ten times more potent than Valium. It has amnesiatic effects.”

“You make it sound like I’m going to be putting myself into situations where I’ll be drugged,” Morgan grumbled, setting the bottle down to grab the other one, listening to the comforting sound of vegetables being chopped up.

“It is better to be safe than sorry, Morgan,” Hannibal pushed, glancing up from his work to see the boy pick up the next bottle.

“Gravol?” Morgan asked, fingers trailing over the label. “What does this do?”

“It’s used for motion sickness, but when mixed with other chemicals it can produce the effect of dimenhydrinate.”

“I’m assuming the same thing happens with Benadryl,” Morgan muttered as he moved onto the next bottle. “What chemicals? Alcohol? Because those two are relatively easy to just pick up at the store, aren’t they?”

Hannibal smiled with a small nod. “So you do pay attention in class.”

“Of course I do!” Morgan argued defensively. “Walter’s the one who doesn’t!”

Hannibal chuckled at the outburst that didn’t normally come from Morgan unless Walter was messing with him. “Walter still pays attention, Morgan. He fidgets somedays, but he is just as good as you in all subjects.”

“Even German?”

Morgan could see the small tip of Hannibal’s lips and Morgan smiled at the truth that was in the curl on his father’s mouth. “Even German,” Hannibal finally answered, adding oil to a pan of the stovetop for it to heat up. “He might be slower than you, but that does not dampen his mind. He is just as smart as you.”

“If you say so,” Morgan muttered with a small shrug, reaching out for the next bottle. Gamma-hydroxybutyric acid. “This is the one that you gave us.”

“Correct,” Hannibal agreed as he put the vegetables he had chopped into the pan before adding some balsamic and garlic salt to them. Hannibal went back to the fridge and pulled out some fresh

berries. “Morgan, you need to understand that something even as simple as ibuprofen can be used against you. You have to be vigilant and cognizant.”

“Codeine,” Morgan muttered before he picked up the last bottle. “Ketamine.” Morgan set aside the last bottle and watched as Hannibal added the berries to a pot on the stove. “And you won’t tell me which one you’re using?”

“Part of your lesson is knowing which drug is being used. Everything that I teach you is important and could save your life.”

Morgan frowned, reaching out for one of the bottles once more, opening it and smelling at the contents. There was a faint chemicaliness to the bottle, but not much else. Morgan looked over the pills curiously before dumping them out on the counter to look over them, touching each one absently with an index finger.

“Would it have saved my moms?” Morgan asked with sadness in his eyes.

“*So einfach ist das nicht, kleiner hase,*” *(“It's not that simple, little bunny,)* Hannibal said kindly knowing how difficult the topic was for the child. “The human body’s functions are easily affected, and it takes too many years to master methods that can help a person to temporarily prevent the malfunction or at least stabilize it until a surgeon can try to repair something that might not quite repair completely,” he explained.

“Were they beyond help?” Morgan asked in a whisper.

“Yes.”

“Did you try?” he asked, doing his best to not cry.

“With all my being, I assure you. I hate to lose a person in my care, that's why I gave up on surgery.”

“So you became a mind´s doctor,” the boy stated firmly with a nod as he scooped all of the pills up and put them back into the bottle he had dumped them from.

“A psychiatrist,” Hannibal corrected kindly as he flipped the vegetables in the pan before stirring at the berries that were boiling on the stove.

“Why?”

“I don't like to lose a patient in my-”

“But you kill, Father.” Morgan’s eyes were bright with questions as they watched Hannibal work.

“I do.” Hannibal reached out to the counter and took all the bottles in his hand, placing them beside the stove. “Close your eyes for a moment Morgan. You don’t get to see what I put in these.”

Morgan exhaled deeply and did as he was asked, swiveling back and forth in his chair while he listened closely to what Hannibal was doing to see if he could guess which item Hannibal would use.

“Why is that different?” Morgan asked as the room slowly began to disorient.

“I-I appreciate life, Morgan, I do. What I don't appreciate is that others waste it. If I find uselessness in that I have no problem to take what they are wasting,” he explained in as simple of terms as he could. It wouldn’t do to lie to the child, but it also wouldn’t do to give him all of the details. He was still far too young. “I found another way to better other people's chances in life through psychiatry that surgery could not help.”

“What part of surgery couldn’t help them?”

“I am afraid of making a mistake that costs other people a loved one,” he stated solemnly. “You can open your eyes again Morgan.”

“You have performed surgeries on us,” Morgan reminded as he blinked his eyes open. Hannibal was setting out several things in front of him on several dishes. A stir fry that was steaming and hot, a raspberry jam, some leftover rice from the night before and some carrot slices and hummus that Hannibal had made a day or two prior for a snack for Walter.

“Simple ones that will not cost your life. I am sure that If I had to choose between trying or losing one of you I will take the risk.” Hannibal’s smile was soft and he rested his hip against the counter with his arms folded and a hand towel over his shoulder. “Losing either one of you is not an option as far as I am concerned.”

“Do you know why my mom didn't go for surgery?”

“I am afraid we never discussed it, but knowing her as I did, I believe that it was more a matter of vocation to help others in a field not as well studied. I believe that for her it was a challenge. Not much is known about the mind, Morgan. It is quite fascinating.”

“So… Surgery is a field that you really need to be the very best in to leave a mark because of the many people in it?”

“In a way… Yes,” Hannibal whispered. “But you’re not meant to leave a notable mark in surgery. It’s about saving the person, not about the recognition that comes with it. Saving a life is more important. It shouldn’t feed a hero’s complex.”

“A hero’s complex?” Morgan asked curiously as he reached out to pull the several dishes more within his reach to look over them.

“No matter the situation or the odds, they want to be the ones that save the day,” Hannibal explained, watching Morgan carefully, but Morgan didn’t eat anything. He simply stared cautiously.

“If I wanted to go into the medical field, would it be more rewarding to go into surgery or psychiatry?” Morgan questioned. “I feel like finding a way to stop the bleeding while others try to prevent it might mean more in the end. And you can see physical recovery far better than you can mental. I think I’d prefer to go into surgery.”

“What a stunning boy you are, *kleiner hase,*” Hannibal said, smiling. “Seems to me, that you have had to find yourself a challenge at a very young age. I will teach you everything you need to know if that is the route that you want to follow.”

“You’ll teach me?” Morgan asked with a small smile coming to his face as he reached out for the spoon for the jam that Hannibal had made. Hannibal’s hand reached out and stilled Morgan’s hand

before Morgan could pull the spoon to himself. “What?”

“You don’t have to do this Morgan,” Hannibal answered in assurance. “If this frightens you or-”

“It’s important,” Morgan answered, brows furrowed in confusion. “I need to learn this.”

“You sound like Walter.” Hannibal’s smile was fond.

“I trust you, Father. I always have. You’re not going to hurt me.”

“Why are you so sure?”

“You’ve had countless chances,” Morgan explained, his free hand reaching out to pull Hannibal’s from his. He put the spoon to his lips and met Hannibal’s eyes. “Not to mention what dad would do to you if you did anything to me.” Morgan placed the spoon in his mouth and licked it clean, carefully noting the flavor, smiling at Hannibal’s slightly surprised look.

“What Will would do indeed,” Hannibal muttered, stepping back from the counter to pick up all of the drugs that he had pulled out. “Just a small bit of each please. I don’t want you falling out of your chair. When I come back, I want to know your findings.”

Morgan watched Hannibal leave before he dropped down from the counter and took the jam with him. It would be a waste, but he tossed it into the sink, turning on the water to wash it away. He then moved onto the stir fry and the fork, taking a bite of the veggies. He frowned and spit them back out on the plate. Rosemary. Other than that, they might have been fine, he wasn’t about to find out. That went into the trash with a small smile. Hannibal would be upset if he wasted that food without a reason other than rosemary, but he was wasting food by drugging it anyways.

Then the hummus. There was something wrong with that. Morgan couldn’t place it, but it was wrong. He spit it into the trash along with the stir fry and then went for the rice. A single spoonful of that and Morgan nodded, letting that be the only thing that he didn’t throw away.

Morgan glanced back up to Hannibal when Hannibal entered the kitchen once more, drying his hands on the hand towel before he tossed it back over his shoulder. Hannibal stopped and looked over the kitchen curiously. His eyes landed on Morgan and Morgan looked back, head tipped to the side.

“They start to work quickly, don’t they?” Morgan asked as a heaviness began to fill his limbs and his mind quieted just a bit.

“We’ll adjust your dosages as we go,” Hannibal explained with a nod. “This is a baseline to see what you know and how your body reacts.”

“The jam. There was a bitterness under the sweetness. You tried to counter it with extra sugar. It was grainy,” Morgan explained. Hannibal folded his arms over his chest as he listened to the young child. “You should have let it cook longer.”

Hannibal gave a huff of laughter. “I will keep that in mind, Morgan. What drug was in the jam?”

“Ketamine, I would have to guess.” A hand went to Morgan’s head and Hannibal moved quickly forward, scooping the young boy up and into his arms. Morgan let himself be carried through the house and towards his room.

“What else, Morgan?”

“The hummus was bitter too. Almost like cough syrup.” Morgan rested his head against Hannibal’s shoulder as his head began to feel heavy. “Codeine.”

“What about the stir fry?”

“Rosemary. You know I don’t like rosemary,” Morgan grumbled, arms weak and unable to hold to his father any longer. His bed was soft beneath him as he was laid in it and he couldn’t remember Hannibal having entered the room.

“Was there anything in the stir fry?” Hannibal pressed.

“No. And nothing in the rice.”

“Then why did you throw it away?”

Morgan could feel his hair being brushed back, but his vision was already black and Hannibal’s voice far away. “Rosemary.” There was a small laugh from Hannibal.

“You only took a small bite from each, right?”

“Yes.” Morgan could feel the way the word slurred from his mouth.

“I’ll be in to check on you in a little while. Ketamine and Codeine can be extremely...” Hannibal’s voice faded away.

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Walter’s pencil tapped on his desktop and he shifted uncomfortably in his uniform. He hadn’t thought about what he would be wearing everyday now that he was shoved into a private school. If he had known that it would be this bad, he wouldn’t have complained when Hannibal wanted him to wear nice jeans and a button-down shirt.

The tie was suffocating, and the jacket was a thick and scratchy fabric that did not bear in mind that they were currently in the end of summer or that the building did not hold an air conditioning unit.

Walter pulled at the knot against his throat and looked out the window at the sunny day that he would have loved to be playing soccer in more than sitting in the classroom. But this was what he wanted. He had wanted something normal. He had wanted to get out of the house more. He wanted to be away from all of the darkness that lurked in the corners of that beautiful villa.

But he couldn't seem to exactly escape the claw of either Will or Hannibal. He saw far too much, could observe far too much, imagine situations far too much. He saw each of these people far deeper than he wanted to because of Will. Will had taught him empathy, reopened his imagination from where it had been closed off in baseball. He could pick apart people’s minds because of Hannibal. Hannibal had shown him all of the psychology tricks that Will was always so horribly conscious of whenever he spoke with Hannibal about something serious.

And there was always a bully. Walter had been able to pick the kid out the first day. Had tried to be nice to the kid the first day. Some fourteen-year-old who thought he ran the school because his father made the largest donations to the school. Walter was certain that Hannibal could have

matched an easily exceeded any check that the kid's dad could write, but there was no point in the world knowing that.

His black hair was perfectly gelled back and his eyes reminded Walter of coke with how dark they were. Skin tanned from spending days in the summer sun. He had two other goonies that trailed behind him and Walter guessed that they only liked the boy because of the money he had. The others were nowhere near as well off if the wear and tear of their uniforms was anything to go off of.

Ivano was his name. But there was nothing holy or gracious about him unless you were a teacher. Teachers looked past the physical violence that he liked to show to anyone around him, even his two goons.

And the physical violence was nothing like what David had done to Walter back in Germany. This was different. Slamming hands in door jams, stapling fingers with the staplers when the line for the stapler became too long and he didn't want to wait anymore, burning people with the metal strip in rulers that he would heat up with friction and the sole of his shoe. He was creative, Walter had to give him that. And it got the boy exactly what he wanted. He ruled with fear and Walter was curious if Hannibal would be proud or if he would find the boy extremely rude just like Walter did or probably, sadly dull.

Ivano reminded Walter a bit of Danny. It had been a long time since he had thought of the boy and what possibly befell him, curious if he was still just as mentally gone as Walter felt he was becoming, wondering if Jordan had taught his son everything that Hannibal and Will were now teaching him. Would he end up in a corrections facility for children like he had been? Would doctors slowly pick apart his mind? Not like one didn't do that already.

The class was finally dismissed and Walter snatched up his books, hurrying from the room to head to his gym class. As luck would have it, they were in the middle of their soccer unit and Walter was finally enjoying something other than math for once. At least those two things were the same when it came to the language barrier he was still navigating, though he was faring far better here than he was in Germany. There was a small comfort in the idea that math and soccer would always be the same no matter where he ended up.

In the locker rooms, Walter changed to his dark blue gym shorts and gray shirt that had the school logo on it. He had just shoved his shoe back onto his foot when there was a loud, metallic crash.

Walter glanced up just in time to see a boy, who was incredibly small and underweight for his age, tumble to the floor. He most likely suffered from some form of ADHD, Walter concluded. Medications with Methylphenidate used to handle the neurodevelopmental disorder often led to an affected appetite and slowed long-term growth.

Ivano picked the child from the ground and his back was slammed up against the row of lockers, medium colored curly hair bouncing with the force as another loud clanging filled the locker room. Other kids passed by, not saying a thing, most far too afraid to stand up to Ivano. But the fear in those stormy blue eyes pulled at something in Walter, though he couldn't exactly name what it was that made him feel protective of the kid he didn't know.

"Give me your lunch money," Ivano ordered in Italian. Such a cliche role for him to play. Normally he was far more entertaining than that. Walter sighed and pulled his foot up onto the bench he sat on to tie his shoelaces. "Now!" There was another crash and a whimper as the small boy's head slammed into the locker.

Walter's eyes once more flickered up to the scene that was still going ignored and he bit his bottom lip, Hannibal's words from his first day of school once more replaying in his head as they so often did.

*You need to learn how to control yourself when Will and I aren't there to guide you. There will be many situations in which you will feel the urgency of being involved, but the safety of all of us relies on as low of a profile you can manage, Mangustėli*.

Walter inhaled deeply, something almost painful as he finally placed exactly what made him want to help the kid. He looked like Morgan and the idea of protection that had been drilled into him was working the way that Will and Hannibal had always meant it to. But the idea of another restart for their family, especially for Morgan, and losing the possibility of attending a real school made up his mind. He straightened himself up and left the locker room, turning a blind eye like the rest of the school.

He found himself out on the field with the rest of the boys, most of whom were fooling around until the teacher called the attention of the class. He grabbed a ball from the large crate at the edge of the field and dropped it to his feet. He kicked it away from the group and made himself busy on his own. He didn't really have friends, not that he cared. It was only his second week, so there was still time, but he wasn't honestly sure what he would do with a friend who wasn't Morgan.

It wasn't like he could introduce them to his family. His parents stayed as hidden behind closed doors as they could while feeding into their hobbies as they liked to call it. And he would have to lie about everything. Well, he wouldn't lie. That had been drilled into him too. No lying, just carefully constructed truths.

No one would actually know him. No one else had parents like his, no one else was in his same situation, no one else could understand him like Morgan could. So it was just better off for him to stick with the kid and be alone. It was safer for everyone.

Class started off without a hitch, running drills which Walter didn't mind, even with the blaring summer heat, wishing he could just go relax in the fountain in the backyard before starting to work on that tree house that Morgan had wanted built.

Hannibal had been more than happy to obtain the supplies and had offered to help Walter construct the house which was slowly coming together. Walter was meant to draw out the plans for Will to approve and until such a time, the wood and all of the tools sat waiting in the backyard. And it wouldn't so much be a treehouse as it would be a fort of some sort. The only trees they had in their backyard were peaches, lemons and an olive tree, all of which would never be able to hold up a treehouse, but Walter was certain he could figure out some sort of stilts so there would still be a ladder for Morgan to climb.

Walter was pulled from his thoughts as a ball raced past him. He followed it carefully and watched as it met with curly haired boy's ankles and sent him careening into the ground. There was some snickering from Ivano and Walter frowned, hands clenched as he tried not to engage.

Instead, he made his way over to the kid who had sat up and was looking over his knee that was scraped up and bleeding lightly. He held out his hand and the kid looked up with those pale blue eyes in question.

"You're alright," Walter assured in Italian with a small shrug. "You won't bleed out or anything." The boy stared at his hand and didn't make any move to take it. Walter rolled his eyes. "It doesn't

have teeth. It's not going to bite you."

"You talk funny," he muttered, finally taking Walter's hand and being tugged from the sun burnt grass. "People don't talk like that here."

"I'm not people," Walter muttered, reaching out to dust dirt and grass from the kid's shirt. "I'm Grant."

"Giovanni," the boy replied, eyes turned down. "You really aren't from here, are you?"

Walter gave another shrug. "I'm from all over. Are you alright?"

There was a hint of a smile on Giovanni's face. "You didn't have to help me. No one else does."

Walter didn't answer, just glanced up to where Ivano was busy with his two goons, most likely planning something else. The three were huddled closely together in line for their turn to run the drill again. He pulled the ball towards him and took Giovanni's arm, pulling him back in line so they wouldn't get in trouble for not participating.

There was a whistle that called off the drills and the class was separated into two teams for a scrimmage. Giovanni had taken a rather close stance next to Walter back at the goal and Walter didn't mention the way the boy hovered. Walter was probably the first person who had ever been nice to him, which was a shame, but Walter couldn't dwell on that now. He had other things to worry about, namely a ball that was coming for him.

Being goalie hadn't been his first pick, but he supposed he was fairly good at it as he was always shoved into that spot. He seemed to be taller than the other boys and could jump higher to block the ball, which was just fine with him on a blistering hot day like that day was.

Walter lowered his center of gravity, hands up and ready to snatch the ball from whatever angle that it was sent in. Only, the direction that Walter had thought the ball would go was in a different direction completely.

Ivano's leg reeled back and his foot made contact with the ball. Before Walter had a chance to react, the ball collided with Giovanni's chest and sent the kid back to the dirt, moaning and gasping from the wind being knocked out of him, a feeling that Walter knew all too well.

Walter dropped his hands to his sides and raced out of the goalie box to the collapsed kid, kneeling beside him. He pushed Giovanni onto his back to try to open up his airway and did his best to ignore the way that tears were pouring down his cheeks from terrified eyes.

"Sit up," Walter commanded softly, taking Giovanni's shoulders and dragging the sputtering child upright. "You need to focus on your breathing," Walter instructed, a hand pressing to Giovanni's diaphragm that was spasming. "Inhale deeply, come on." There was a sharp gasp and the boy shuttered. "Exhale fully." Giovanni obeyed, though it was just as jittery as his inhale. "Good. Again."

By this point a small group had formed around them and the teacher was pushing himself through the crowd of boys to kneel beside the two of them. He glanced over the situation for a moment, clearly unsure what exactly to do to help.

Walter rolled his eyes. What a pathetic person to have on staff. A physical education teacher who didn't know basic first aid. Not that a temporarily paralyzed diaphragm was anything to worry greatly over, it would right itself in a minute or two, but the sentiment still stood. The teacher was incompetent.

"Grant, will you take him to the nurse's office, please?" the teacher asked with a small sigh.

Walter gave a nod, though he was still focused on the finally breathing Giovanni. "Are you ok?" he asked softly.

"Boys, give them some space," the teacher instructed and slowly the crowd dispersed.

"Fine," Giovanni got out, voice rough. He wiped at the tears on his cheeks and Walter hoisted him to his feet.

"Let's get you to the nurse's office. They can at least clean up your knee and get you some water," Walter muttered. Giovanni simply nodded, arms wrapped tightly around his middle. There was a laugh and Walter's eyes flashed up to where Ivano was high fiving one of his group and the boiling that Walter had been trying to keep down was finally overflowing. "Get going. I'll be there in a moment."

Giovanni gave a confused look, but nodded and started the walk back to the school. Walter used his foot to pop the nearby ball up and into his hand, eyes tight on Ivano. He walked over to the group, not even sure he dared to say anything. It wasn't until he was nearly next to them that he called that name.

"Ivano."

He turned around and Walter took a few quick steps, drop kicking the ball as hard as he could. There was a satisfying ping from the ball connecting with Ivano's face and Walter let out a deep breath, body tense with adrenaline.

Ivano dropped to the ground with a bright cry, hands over his face and Walter stepped closer, simply watching as his two friends scurried back and away from him. Walter lowered himself next to the groaning Ivano whose fingers were slick from blood and Walter nearly laughed at the idea that that perfect little nose was going to be just as broken as his had been not long ago.

"You touch him again, I promise it will be much worse for you," Walter hissed lowly, ignoring the shouts that were coming from the teacher. Walter pushed himself back to his feet and placed the teacher's words somewhere so deep in his mind they were muffled. Giovanni had stopped and was staring with wide eyes. Walter caught up with the kid and snatched up his arm, hauling him back towards the school. "If he touches you again, you tell me," Walter instructed, jaw tight. "Let's go get you cleaned up."

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"Mr. and Dr. Sorensen," the headmaster, a rather old man and greying man in his 70's, greeted with a firm handshake given to both Will and Hannibal. "Thank you for coming down here."

"Of course," Hannibal answered.

Will didn't say anything. Instead, his eyes wandered to the window in the headmaster's office where outside, Walter sat in a chair, looking bored out of his mind while two other boys sat beside

him. One with curly dark hair that was rather small and another who was holding a bloody rag covered ice pack to his nose.

“If you would please take a seat,” the headmaster motioned to the two chairs in front of his desk and it took Hannibal’s hand on Will’s shoulder to pull Will from the window to join Hannibal in the chair beside him.

“What is this about?” Will questioned when the headmaster opened his mouth. The man closed it again and leaned back in his chair, hands folded over his chest. Will followed the man’s gaze once more to the three boys outside of the office. There was no remorse that Will could read off of Walter. Nothing but annoyance. From the curly haired kid was a mellow gratefulness and the injured child might as well have been screaming for how in pain he was.

“Let me get straight to the point,” the headmaster, Will returned his attention to the desk, reading over the nameplate, Leonardo Russo said. “We have a strict no bullying policy at this school and your son was seen by one of his teachers and several of the students, purposefully kicking a ball into Mr. Ricci’s face. He then threatened Mr. Ricci that he would inflict more harm.”

There was something nearly hilarious about the concept and Will had to hold back a smile, especially at the look of disapproval over Hannibal’s brow. Will knew Walter. He knew exactly how Walter thought, knew exactly what they had taught him, exactly what the situation had called for.

Will once more turned his eyes out of the pane of glass and studied the three boys carefully. Walter was now speaking quietly with the curly haired boy whose hair held grass in it, and whose cheek had a smudge of dirt over it. He was still in his gym clothes and his bandaged knee could be seen clearly from his shorts.

The third boy was a Ricci. Will knew the name well. The Ricci’s were a prominent family and rather active in the school. Emilia Ricci was on the school board and her husband owned a decent stake in Marriott International and had grown up in this academy as one of the top students. They liked to show their devotion with large sums of cash when things ever got sticky and Will was nearly certain that that was what Hannibal would be doing to get Walter out of this situation.

If Walter really had done just as the headmaster claimed, then Emilia would make sure that Walter was expelled for the damage inflicted on her son. But Will was positive that he wouldn’t be upset if that were the outcome. He knew that the kid with the scraped up knee was the reason behind all of whatever this was. Walter had only been doing what he was taught to do. Protect someone much smaller than him.

“I see,” Hannibal acknowledged, a hand reaching out to rest on Will’s knee, pulling Will’s attention back to the conversation at hand.

“At the moment we are looking at a minimum of a week’s suspension, possible explosion.”

“Do you know what caused the fight?” Will asked, his own hand moving to cover his husbands with a reassuring squeeze. They would be discussing this later; he knew they would. Hannibal would see this as irresponsible and want to teach Walter a lesson instead of seeing it as it was, Walter trying to be a good person.

“Neither your son nor Mr. Esposito will tell me.” Headmaster Russo gave a small shrug. “I only have the word of my staff and the other students at the moment.”

Hannibal opened his mouth to speak, but Will sat up a little more in his chair, speaking before Hannibal could. “And what was Mr. Ricci’s explanation?”

“He told me exactly what everyone else told me. You son picked up the ball after Mr. Esposito had accidentally been hit with it. He was supposed to take Esposito to the nurse’s office and instead hit Mr. Ricci. I’m still not honestly sure what Mr. Esposito has to do with all of this, other than your son ignoring the teacher and escorting Mr. Esposito to the nurse’s office as was originally asked of him.”

Hannibal’s grip tightened on Will’s leg and Will hid back the hiss at the pain. There would be bruises there now, but he could admire them later.

“Headmaster-”

“Can I speak to my son?” Will interrupted Hannibal and Hannibal glared at him. Will ignored it.

Russo’s lips pursed and he glanced out of his office. “I don’t see why not,” he finally answered, pushing himself from his chair and went to his office door. He opened it and stepped outside, closing it behind him. The moment it was shut, Hannibal removed his hand from Will’s knee and turned in his chair.

“What are you doing?” Hannibal asked back in a low voice. “What are you trying to prove here?”

“What?” Will asked back with a small and disbelieving laugh. He shook his head, hand rubbing at the sore spot on his knee. “You’re really going to take some pompous asshole and some pompous asshole’s kid’s word on this over your own son’s?”

“What he did-”

“Will be punished,” Will assured. “He knew better than to do that, but he isn’t in the wrong.”

Hannibal gave a small sigh. “What did you see, my love?”

“Nothing that you couldn’t see if you would just look,” Will replied snarkily, though his smile was dazzling. “Trust your son.”

“Stand up straight, boy,” Russo ordered as Walter stepped into the room.

Walter stood at Hannibal’s side, eyes looking between his parents and Will watched the boy’s expression carefully. It was still annoyed, but held a bit more somberness to it when Hannibal cleared his throat. Walter straightened himself up just for Hannibal and frowned.

“Tell us what happened?” Will instructed kindly and brown eyes gave a curious look as if they were surprised that he was being allowed to voice his side of the issue at all. When Walter didn’t speak, Will prompted once more. “Grant, what happened today?”

Walter swallowed and Will could feel the hesitation roll off of the boy as he once more looked over at Hannibal. He inhaled deeply and sighed, shoulders deflating. “Ivano kept beating up Giovanni. Slammed him into the lockers multiple times and kicked a soccer ball at him more than once.” Walter pointed out the window, brows furrowed up and he licked his lips. “He picks on everyone and I was just tired of it so I hit him with a ball right back.”

Will's brow raised and he looked over the back of Hannibal, trying to read the man's emotions, but found them blank. Hannibal wouldn't let him in, not after accusing the man of trusting someone over his own family. Will would have to chip at Hannibal's icy walls when they got home.

"Can anyone confirm your story?" Russo grumbled from behind his desk.

Walter's hand fell back to his side with a thud and he rolled his eyes, mouth open in the same way it did when he was about to bite out something he hadn't fully thought through yet.

"Careful with what you're about to say, son," Hannibal warned tightly and Walter's mouth snapped shut once more. It took another moment or two before Walter finally begrudgingly answered.

"You can ask Giovanni, sir." Walter nodded his head out the window, something more composed on him now. "He will tell you everything."

Before anyone else could so much as think of a response, Will was on his feet and moving to the office door, knowing all eyes would be on him curiously or in shock. He didn't care. He opened the door and glanced around the corner where the curly haired boy had distanced himself from the bleeding one.

"Giovanni," Will called and the curly haired boy stiffened before slowly looking over at Will. "Would you mind coming in here for a moment? Grant's father and I would like to speak with you, if that's alright."

Giovanni gave a single nod and got to his feet, slowly coming over to Will. He stopped by Will's side and glanced over Will with cautious blue eyes that reminded him so much of Morgan. Will's body straightened at the thought and he turned back to where Walter was still standing by Hannibal, hands fists at his sides. That's what this was about. He saw his brother getting hurt and couldn't not help the boy.

"You talk differently, like Grant," Giovanni muttered and Will gave a small nod.

"I'm not from here," Will explained gently with a small smile back at the boy. He stepped out of the way of the door and beckoned Giovanni to follow him into the headmaster's office. Will closed the door and went back to his chair, sitting down, gaze meeting Walter's. "I want you to stay quiet, do you understand?" Walter gave a nod, always obedient. No questions asked. There didn't need to be any questions, he knew the reasonings. It was to try to prove that they hadn't made up the story together, to allow Giovanni all the room to talk. "Giovanni, would you please explain to us what happened today?"

There was another stiffness that entered the boy's body and he froze up, eyes flickering around at everyone in the room, looking as if he were being led to the slaughter. Terrified, small, battered and bruised. Will's attention shifted to Hannibal when the man inhaled deeply and straightened his shoulders. Will wasn't sure what Hannibal smelt, but it obviously lingered enough around the child that it gave Will a good indication that something was wrong at home.

Giovanni didn't look abused by any means, but Will hadn't either. Money in place of love then. His mother was most likely a drunk and spent all her time with friends, and the father was never there and always working. Hannibal had probably smelt alcohol or cigarettes on the child. That was the most common thing Hannibal picked up here in Italy. Granted, everyone did drink and smoke, that's just what this city was, but this had to be excessively if Hannibal had picked up a bit more clearly on it.

“Son, you’re not in trouble,” Hannibal spoke up, voice much softer and Will assumed there would be a warm smile on the man’s face. “We just want the full story.”

Giovanni turned his attention to Walter who rolled his eyes in a similar way as he did when Morgan would look to him for clarification. “Just tell them,” Walter instructed with a small exhale. “I already told them.”

Giovanni looked a bit surprised by that and Will couldn’t help but wonder why they were trying so hard to be silent. Maybe Giovanni hadn’t wanted the fuss. Or maybe he didn’t want his parents to know that something had happened. Will could sympathize with that. He did everything in his power to make sure his dad was never in his life because it would end with a belt.

“Ivano,” Giovanni stated, but seemed to stop, head lolling forward and hands wringing themselves together nervously. “In the locker room he tried to take my lunch money and shoved me into the lockers. And then when we were in class he kicked the ball at me and knocked me over several times. Grant was just helping me.”

“Where were you hit?” Russo asked.

Giovanni seemed to shrink back even further.

“It’s alright,” Grant assured, head tipped to the side. “You can tell them.”

With a deep breath, Giovanni took the hem of his shirt and pulled it up. Will looked over the boy’s torso that had an angry red Y in the middle of it from the seams stitched into the ball as well as blossoming purple bruising.

Hannibal sat up a little fuller, if that were somehow possible and stuck a hand out to the boy, who once more looked to Walter. Walter gave a nod and Giovanni stepped over to Hannibal, who took one of the boy’s hips to pull him closer.

“I’m a doctor. Are you having trouble breathing?” Hannibal asked, fingers gently touching at the bruising.

The boy hissed in a deep breath and shook his head. “Not anymore.”

Hannibal nodded. “Grant, would you have the school nurse get some anti inflammatories as well as an ice pack for Mr. Esposito?”

“Yes, sir,” Walter answered without a moment of hesitation, and went for the door.

“I did not dismiss you,” Russo stuttered out, looking utterly bewildered.

Walter stopped and turned back to the room, glancing between the headmaster and Hannibal for a moment. Will gave a small smile as Walter once more turned from the room without a word, obviously finding Hannibal far more in charge than the headmaster. Walter left the room and Will got to his feet, heading over to Giovanni. He knelt down next to the boy with a kind smile.

“Where are your parents?” he asked softly.

“My dad’s at work and my mom is out of town. She travels a lot.”

“I see.” Will gave a nod and stood up, turning to Russo. “Has his father been contacted at all?”

“Uh.” Russo’s brows furrowed. “N-no.”

“Then I suggest you get him to come down here this instant,” Will instructed. “I know that I would want to know immediately if my child has come to harm by way of another student. Zero tolerance for bullying, isn't it?”

“Ethan,” Hannibal scolded sharply, before turning back to the child. “Can you take a deep breath for me? I want to make sure none of your ribs are broken.”

Will’s eyes were dark as they narrowed on the headmaster who had yet to move from his surprised stupor. Russo met his gaze and the old man nodded. “I will make some calls,” he stated. “As for your son-”

“My son is not your concern,” Will cut in, a hand resting against Russo’s desk. “It is very clear to me that my son was merely protecting Mr. Esposito from another one of your students. Now, my son should not have engaged in physical violence, and he will be disciplined greatly for that by his father and me when we get home, but I am certain that when the school board hears of how you have conducted yourself in this situation where only one child was checked for injury and another was blamed, then they-”

“Mr. Sorensen,” Russo interrupted and Will bit back his shout. “Please, let’s handle this rationally.”

“Rationally?” Will demanded, forcing himself to not laugh incredulously. “How dare-”

“Ethan,” Hannibal cut in, a strong hand clasping Will’s shoulder. Will inhaled deeply and closed his eyes, holding the breath and allowing himself to fall submissive to the grip around him. “I would like to speak to the headmaster alone. Would you escort Giovanni out of the room and make sure that both injured boys take some medicine to help with the pain and swelling?”

Will let out his held breath and let his eyes open, falling on a rather red-looking Russo. He turned to face Hannibal. “Of course,” he muttered. Hannibal gave him a patient smile. “Behave.” It was whispered and Hannibal’s eyes seemed to flash with the warning. Will pulled from Hannibal’s grip and stepped over to the boy who had readjusted his shirt over his body. He took the boy’s shoulder and guided him from the office, closing the door behind him. “Let’s get you taken care of, shall we?”

“I can’t believe you stood up to the headmaster like that,” Giovanni whispered. “No one ever says things like that to him.”

“Well, I’m not everyone else,” Will mumbled. Giovanni sat back down in the chair that was away from Ivano and Will glanced over the child who was teary eyed and still clutching the ice pack to his face. He patted Giovanni’s shoulder and slowly stepped over to Ivano. “Have you been given any medicine?” The child shook his head and Will sighed. “Have your parents been called?”

The answer was muffled and barely understandable. “My mom is supposed to be coming.”

“At least one thing was done right,” Will grumbled, looking up when Walter once more entered the room. Will held out his hand and Walter stepped over, placing the items he had gotten from the nurse. “Sit. We’ll be discussing this further when we get home.”

“Alright,” Walter whispered, obeying and taking a seat.

Will looked over his son once more before getting to work. He went to Giovanni first and tucked the pack of pills into his palm before activating the ice pack. “Put this on over your shirt,” he instructed, holding out the pack.

Giovanni took it and placed it to his torso with a small amount of discomfort. Will nodded his approval before heading over to a water cooler and pulling two cups from it. He filled both up and then opened the pack of pills, splitting the two up. He gave one to Giovanni and the other to Ivano whose nose and under his eyes was a spider's web of purple and blood when he removed the ice pack.

The silence that filled the room was no longer quite as tense, but Will could feel the hate melting off of the three boys as they sat in those chairs in a line beside each other. Will folded his arms and looked back into the office where Hannibal was clearly more calm looking and composed than the headmaster whose words were muffled by the walls and glass, but whose face was just as red and angry as one could probably be.

A few more minutes passed in a dull silence as Will did his best to brush off the other emotions in the room when the unmistakable sound of upset heels clacked down the hallway. Will inhaled deeply, steadying himself and standing up straight as an angered looking woman entered the room.

Her dark hair was windswept, and her face flushed from her hurried walk and irritation. Her whole presence screamed money, but what in this place didn’t? Hannibal looked like he bathed in it each morning, so Will assumed that after all this time he looked the same, though he didn’t want to admit it.

She looked over the boys, eyes finally stopping on her son. Her hand snatched up his shoulder and she tipped his head back, looking over the injury and Will watched as her spine tightened up. She stood upright, eyes aflame and Will took a small step forward as she pointed her finger between the two other boys, Italian spit at them.

“Which one of you did this?”

Walter slowly pushed himself from his seat. “I did,” he admitted. Before Will could react, a hand came down and across Walter’s face. Something hot bubbled inside of him and raced forward, snatching up Emilia’s wrist before she could bring it down once more.

“Touch my son again and we’re going to have bigger issues than this,” Will hissed, receiving burning dark eyes on him. She was trying to be frightening, but nothing scared Will anymore. Nothing like her anyways. His children being hurt was a far worse fear than anything this woman could possibly try to do.

“Dad,” Walter warned in English, a hand rubbing at the red mark over his cheek. “It’s alright.”

“I should have known it was your son,” Emilia spit out and Will’s attention went back to her as she pulled her wrist from his grip. She straightened herself upright and brushed some of her hair behind her ear. “Your child would be someone to cause trouble like this.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Will demanded. A hand took the sleeve of his suit coat and he glanced down at Walter who wore a begging look on his face. “Stay out of this,” he ordered, but there was a sharp look from Walter.

“I’m the reason all of this started,” Walter argued.

“No, you’re not, and you know you’re not,” Will shot back, English just as sharp as his Italian. “Sit down.” Walter’s face scrunched up at the order, obviously disliking it, before he obeyed and sat back down, hand still gingerly rubbing the slap. Will turned back to the woman. “If you have something against me, say it, but do not think for a moment that I am going to allow you to drag my son through the mud with you.”

“I’m going to make sure your son is expelled!”

“I would love to see you try.”

“You low class-”

“Ethan,” Hannibal’s voice called from the office door, eyes flickering around the scene. Will turned to his husband and could see the shift from something calm and collected to something angry when his eyes landed on Walter, whose cheek was a shiny red. He stepped from the room and over to the two of them. “Emilia, you would do well to never raise a hand at my son again. Do I make myself clear?”

There was something in the way the words were said that sucked the air from the room, something that Will still couldn’t exactly seem to copy. A command that demanded absolute respect with an underlying threat that didn’t need to be hinted at.

Emilia gave a nod, but didn’t say a word. A word didn’t need to be said.

“Would you two please join me in the headmaster’s office?” Hannibal said, tone again back to its normal level of kindness. “We have a great deal to discuss.” Will motioned for Emilia who eyed him harshly before stepping around both men to head for the open office door. Will met Hannibal’s gaze and Hannibal gave a knowing nod to show he understood. Will exhaled and composed himself a bit more before following Hannibal’s instructions.

Hannibal watched his husband pass him before he looked over at Giovanni. He knelt beside the boy’s chair. “How are you feeling?” he asked and the little boy shrugged.

“Cold.”

Hannibal gave a small chuckle. “Your father should be here shortly.” The boy winced at the words and Hannibal patted his knee that wasn’t bandaged. “I assure you that he knows exactly what happened and understands completely. You have nothing to be worried over.” Giovanni gave a small nod and Hannibal stood, heading over to Ivano, kneeling once more. “And how are you feeling?”

“It won’t stop pulsing,” he muttered out from beneath the ice pack.

“I wouldn’t expect it to for a bit.” Hannibal reached out and lowered the boy’s hand to look over the injury there. “You will most likely need to get that looked at, at a hospital. You can ask Grant what recovery looks like. He’s just barely starting to heal from his own broken nose.” There was a breath from Walter, but Hannibal didn’t acknowledge it. “How long have you had ice on that?”

“I don’t know?”

Hannibal nodded. “I would let your injury breathe for a moment. That medicine should be helping with the pain in a bit.” Hannibal rose back to his feet and straightened his coat and tie, eyes on

Walter who met his gaze, knew better than to shy away. He waited silently for whatever Hannibal was going to dish him, but only the same sentiment that Will had given him earlier was said. “We will discuss your punishment at home, young man.”

“Yes, sir,” Walter muttered. He stayed silent until Hannibal was back in Russo’s office and then let out a breath, deflating in his chair.

“Your dad is scary,” Giovanni whispered over to him.

“Which one?” Walter asked lazily, fingers playing with the hem of his t-shirt as a way to ignore the rather loud voices that were coming from the office.

“Both of them.”

Walter gave a small laugh, the smile hurting his hot cheek. His hand reached up and rubbed at it gingerly. “They have their moments,” he agreed. There was a moan from Ivano and Walter looked over to see the kid touching his nose. “Don’t do that. They have to reset it.”

“You’d know all about that, wouldn’t you?” Ivano hissed, but he lowered his hand as instructed.

“More than you could possibly understand. Just let the doctors deal with it. You’re just going to make it worse.” Walter rubbed at his eyes and sighed. “I’m sorry I drug you into this.”

“Just as long as my dad doesn’t take it out on me,” Giovanni laughed, before wincing slightly, adjusting the ice pack against his body. “Do you really think they’ll expel you?”

“I can only hope,” Walter teased. “I promise that will be the very least of my worries.”

“Are your dads really that bad?”

Walter glanced up to find Ivano looking over him curiously, but Ivano quickly turned his attention to the ice pack in his hand. Walter focused his attention back on the window of the office where Will’s jaw was held tightly in a hot silence and Hannibal looked rather disappointed at whatever was being told to him, though Walter knew it was going to be more about him than whatever Russo was saying.

“They have high expectations,” Walter explained with a small shrug. “I knew what was expected of me and I disregarded it. I’m sure it’s not different from what your parents expect from you.”

The office door opened and Will stepped from it, followed by Hannibal. Walter straightened up in his chair, waiting for an order to follow. Before one was said, Ivano’s mother forced her way from the room, her same hot irritability in her heels as she snatched up her son’s arm and pulled him from the room.

“Home,” Hannibal stated. “Now.”

Walter stood without a word and tossed a glance over to Giovanni who gave a small smile. Walter left the room and started down the large empty hallway and passed classroom doors where students were sitting quietly and learning. Walter glanced down at his shoes and looked back up, turning around and towards where his parents were following.

“My uniform-”

“Leave it,” Will instructed, motioning for Walter to keep going. “You can retrieve it later. You have more at home.”

Walter bit his bottom lip, but nodded and started on his walk again, the sound of heels disappearing down the hallway in the opposite direction. “Where’s Ezra?”

“With the babysitter,” Will replied. “Walk.”

The babysitter was a rather nice old lady who lived down the street from them that often would watch the children when Will and Hannibal went out. She was kind and lonely, her children having moved far away and hardly came to visit. She enjoyed showing Walter an annoying amount of pictures and loved teaching Morgan how to cook. All in all, she was better company than most and Walter enjoyed visiting with her on the odd nights he had to.

Walter stepped outside and into the heat of the day and the scent of the ocean as it lapped at the edge of the school. He was about to start up the walkway, but stopped at his name. He turned to look back at Will and Hannibal with a tipped head.

“You have been suspended for the rest of the week,” Hannibal stated and Walter closed his eyes with a small nod. “I expect to see you up and ready for class in the morning. You will resume your studies with me until you are permitted back into school.”

Walter’s brow furrowed in confusion, but he knew better than to question. “Yes, sir.”

“As for your punishment,” Hannibal continued, receiving a questioning turn of Will’s head and Walter immediately knew that they hadn’t discussed a punishment and he was about to get the full brunt of whatever Hannibal had planned. “We’re going to play hide and seek. Do you understand?”

Walter’s mouth opened, but he closed it, glancing around at the canal to one side of him and the bustling city to the other side of him, unsure exactly what he was meant to do. “We’re not near any forests or fields or-”

“You will not always be in a forest or a field, Walter,” Hannibal explained calmly as if this were any other conversation. “In fact, those are rather unlikely scenarios. A city is where you will most likely be found. You have a five-minute head start. I suggest you use it.”

Walter turned to Will whose expression was cold towards Hannibal, but he didn’t argue. Didn’t say anything actually.

“But I-”

“You’re wasting time, son,” Hannibal interrupted Walter, making a show of looking at his watch. “In the real world, you will not have leeway. Please use it wisely.”

“Why hide and seek?” Walter asked cautiously. It had never been used as a punishment before. It was strictly for training and always done at home where Walter knew every inch of the place. This city was never ending with so many hidden passages that not even a born and raised Venetian could possibly know them all. Walter would get lost if he tried to escape into the city.

“If you are grown up enough to handle the situation as you did, I believe you should be perfectly capable of managing things as your age dictates. You have four minutes.”

Walter didn't say another word. Instead, he turned and broke into a sprint up the side of the canal in the direction that he knew. He would have to go home. It was the smartest bet. Home advantage was what he would have. He didn't know this city well enough yet to use it. He knew where the grocery stores were and the movie theaters or small restaurants for when his parents asked him to do the shopping, but he had no hope of hiding there.

Hannibal would never attack him in the open. It was far too much of a threat, but Walter had to return home sometime and the game would be in full effect when he did. It would stay in full effect until one of them was victorious and he knew the only reason he had been given five minutes was so that Hannibal and Will could have a private discussion about what had occurred.

He opened the front door and slammed it shut behind him, locking it. He found a chair from the front sitting room and shoved it under the door handle, stepping back and breathing hard. He couldn't rest though. Not yet.

He raced into the kitchen and grabbed the knife block and any other sharp objects he could and took them out to the backyard. In the corner was a large pile of plywood, two by fours, bags of cement and tools waiting to be made into something else and Walter shoved the items behind the large stacks of wood.

He rushed back into the house and into the front sitting room, opening the piano bench and digging through it until he found one of Will's guns. He let the lid of the bench slam shut and he raced to the study where Hannibal's scalpel was on the desk. He snatched it up and took both of them to the stairs, setting them on the bottom step before racing up them and to his parents' room.

Will's gun was pulled from under his pillow and Walter did a quick sweep of the drawers in the bedside tables and fetched the hunting knife from Will's boots before rushing back down the stairs and taking those gathered items out to the backyard as well.

Walter went back for the house and made it into the kitchen when the front door handle turned and was attempted to be opened. Walter's steps froze and his heart jumped in a way it hadn't in a long time. His head was scrambling for what to do, where to go, where to hide.

This house wasn't like the other two they had lived in. It wasn't expansive with rooms to get lost in. There were no hidden dumbwaiters or windows that allowed one to climb out on the roof. There were the main rooms of the house and that was it.

With a deep breath, Walter slipped back into the back yard and glanced around. Did he dare fetch one of Will's guns? Guns had been against the rules. Guns were used as a last resort, they were not meant to be an end all be all. He would be in further trouble if he used a gun.

And while he was comfortable with knives, he was nowhere near as skilled as Hannibal. He wouldn't stand a chance. He hurried over to the stacks of wood and pulled Will's knife to him, shoving it into his sock and then grabbed the shovel that was leaning up against the fence.

With a deep breath he stood upright and made his way back to the door just in time to see it burst open and the chair skitter across the floor. He broke into a sprint around the corner of their house and pressed his back up against the side of it. He didn't have a way out now. The fence on the side he currently was, was flush with the canal and he could hear the movements of the water over whatever was possibly happening in the house.

The other side of the fence was right up against the house beside theirs, not to mention that it was lined with the fruit trees. The back fence was one he could possibly climb over, but he had never really paid attention to what was on the other side of it. He didn't know if there was a place for him to land in another backyard or if it was a sidewalk between the houses. He would have to check once all of this was over.

Walter's breathing had calmed a bit and his hands had grown sweaty on the shovel as he waited... and waited. After what felt like an immeasurable amount of time, he couldn't stop the confused look over his face. What was Hannibal waiting for? It wouldn't take a detective to find him. Hell, Walter was sure that even the little old lady babysitter would have found him by now.

He was playing hider as was instructed, where was the seeker? He closed his eyes and willed his impatience to dissipate. It wouldn't do to get ahead of himself. He just had to wait. This was a punishment after all. Hannibal wasn't going to be gentle about anything and sweating him out was always an option.

The sun beat down on his face and he was grateful that he was in his gym uniform rather than his school uniform. He wasn't sure if he would have been able to sit outside in heat like that. He would have tried to go inside to at least cool down, if not get a glass of water.

He had to keep his guard up. Letting Hannibal get to him like this wouldn't do him any good. He had to stay focused. Stay in the moment. Stay right here where he was as safe as he had been able to make himself. He didn't know what was around that corner and he wasn't going to find out. The only problem he had was being right handed. He was going to have to step away from the wall to give him enough room to use the shovel.

With a deep inhale, Walter slowly glanced around the wall, unable to see anyone or anything out of the ordinary. He pushed himself back up against the house, unable to keep the confused look from his face. Maybe he was just being waited out. He wasn't sure what else could have possibly been taking Hannibal so long to come after him.

There was movement to the left of him and his heart jumped. He reacted without thought, pulling back the shovel and swinging it. Hannibal merely stepped out of the way with a rather amused look on his face. The effort in the swing shoved Walter forward a few steps and he stumbled past Hannibal, before being able to catch his balance.

Walter turned around, confusion stronger on how the man had gotten past him. He wasn't wet, so he didn't use the canal and climb the fence. There was a flicker of fabric through the open kitchen window and Walter glanced from it, back to Hannibal.

"The window?" he asked with a huff, making sure to angle his body for another hit.

"The gun in the piano bench?" Hannibal asked right back with a slight smile. "You know I don't like guns."

"Still a viable weapon," Walter muttered. Hannibal gave an acknowledging nod. "How long is this going to keep going? Until one of us drops?"

"Until I feel you've learned your lesson."

"You know I didn't do anything wrong."

Walter jumped forward, swinging the shovel once more. This time Hannibal caught it and the movement was so swift that Walter didn't even know what was happening until his back was slammed into the ground and the air was knocked from him. He gasped, a hand going to his chest, shovel lost to him. There was a burn in his hip from a kick and he blinked in the sunlight as Walter tried to figure out how easily Hannibal had been able to throw him over his shoulder.

Hannibal stepped into view while Walter caught his breath, forcing his body to take his own advice to Giovanni earlier that day. The shovel was in his hand and Hannibal tossed it aside, somewhere out of view. Walter coughed and rolled onto his hands and knees.

"There was nothing wrong in protecting someone who needs help," Hannibal agreed. "The means by which you achieved it were immature and reckless."

Walter watched as Hannibal reared back and brought his leg forward. Walter sat up fully and moved aside just enough to capture Hannibal's leg in both of his arms. He pulled as hard as he could and sent Hannibal to the ground. He scrambled up and over Hannibal, planting himself on Hannibal's chest, hands at his throat, adding pressure to them, but not enough to do any harm.

*If you're brought to the ground, do not attempt to get up,* Will's voice called somewhere in the back of his head. *Instead focus on taking their balance, bringing them down to your level. Much easier to pull them down than fight your way up.*

Walter gave a smile and saw it reflected back at him in those intense amber pools. Hannibal was proud of him. It wasn't often that he felt that sort of sentiment from the man and it flooded over him, nearly drowning out anything else. He could usually keep his empathy under control, turn it on and off, unlike Will, but today had just been far too much for him to leaf through and organize yet.

"Am I getting better, or are you just incompetent, Hannibal?" Walter asked before he could stop himself, voice low.

Those red depths quickly went blank and he knew he had hit a nerve. "Just because you've pinned me doesn't mean the fight is over," Hannibal scolded. "Do not think that getting the top hand gives you the fight. You're not focusing, I can throw you off."

"I'm not about to asphyxiate you, Hannibal."

Walter could see the predatory heat in Hannibal's eyes and could feel his control stretching thin and oddly enough wanted to see what happened when the man snapped.

Hannibal surged upwards, knocking Walter off of him and pinned him against the side of the house, hand at his throat, the other against Walter's right wrist so the boy couldn't grab for the knife that was so clearly visible in his sock.

Walter's legs kicked, heels digging into the grass for some purchase, but couldn't find any. His left hand went to Hannibal's wrist, nails digging into the man's flesh as his air was restricted from him. He knew that Hannibal wouldn't actually kill him, but he had been left unconscious more times than he could count and probably more times than what was healthy.

Hannibal released Walter's hand and Hannibal's dipped to his sock and the hunting knife was pulled free. Hannibal flicked it open to look at it with an interested gaze.

“What were you planning to do with this exactly?” he asked, wincing slightly at a deep enough scratch to his wrist that it drew blood. Walter’s right hand was clawed into his arm now as well and he frowned. “I had hoped you would be able to get out of a hold like this by now.”

Walter sputtered around his grip, but Hannibal didn’t loosen in. Instead, he pulled the boy to his feet and slammed him back against the house, attention again going to the knife. The blow hurt, drove something sharp up Walter’s spine and into his head as his lungs burned.

*There is no fighting power against power in this hold,* Hannibal whispered somewhere in the back of his mind. *You have to make the other person as weak as possible. There are plenty of ways to do this, but it depends on the person. This includes height and arm span.*

Hannibal was far too tall. He had no chance in reaching Hannibal to strike him. And he was too strong. Walter would never be able to force his hand from his throat, even if he attacked the elbow. He could try for the thumb, but in all reality, the wrist would have been easier to hit from this angel.

Walter stuck his arm straight up and turned his body towards Hannibal, arm thrown down against Hannibal’s wrist. It broke contact and Walter raced from Hannibal’s grip. He snatched up the fallen shovel and swung without looking.

There was a clang and Walter gasped for a much needed breath as he watched Hannibal tumble to the ground, a deep gash in the bridge of his nose bleeding freely. Walter dropped the shovel and tried to move past Hannibal, but a hand snatched up his ankle and tugged.

Walter gave a surprised sound as he was dragged to the ground, knee hitting the edge of the shovel. Walter gave a cry, something hot shooting up his leg and something sticky poured from it. His hands reached for his knee and came away bloody. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but he knew it wasn’t over. Knew that as long as Hannibal had a grip on that knife, this game wasn’t done.

Walter rolled himself onto his stomach and pushed himself up to his good knee, the other unable to hold his weight. There was a small moan behind him and Walter turned fast enough to catch Hannibal’s wrist, knife clutched tightly in his fist.

“If you were that alert five minutes ago you would have seen me in the window,” Hannibal huffed out, spitting at the blood that was surely filling his mouth from where it dripped down his face like a faucet. Hannibal bore down his weight on Walter and Walter’s arm struggled to hold up Hannibal’s, hand slipping with blood, muscles trembling.

He blinked as blood dropped down into his face and his mind lit up. His other hand was still free and he swiftly let it connect with Hannibal’s nose. Hannibal’s balance shifted and Walter used it to shove Hannibal off of him and onto his back.

Walter straddled Hannibal’s body, making sure his knees were against Hannibal’s arms to pin them there and he pulled the knife from Hannibal’s grip, flipping the blade so the tip was pressed into Hannibal’s suprasternal notch, harsh enough to allow blood to pool in the dip there.

He was breathing hard, knee screaming at him from the pressure he was forcing onto it and his tears rolled down his cheeks. Hannibal’s dress shirt was stained with crimson and covered in dirt and grass stains, but he didn’t look upset by it. In fact, there was another wave of pride that caught Walter off guard and he let out a small sob.

“Hush, *Mangustėli*,” Hannibal whispered. “That’s enough. You’ve done a good job.”

Walter shook his head, the knife dropping from his hand and finding its home in the grass next to Hannibal’s head. His knee, slick with blood, slipped from Hannibal’s arm and he let out a pained squeak at the movement. “Shh,” Hannibal once more instructed, in just as soft a voice, his now free hand reaching up to caress Walter’s cheek. “It’s alright. I think you’ve learned your lesson.”

Hannibal carefully sat up and scooped Walter up and into his arms, Walter surprised that the man could still hold him when he was nearly fifteen. Hannibal got to his feet and Walter let himself be carried from the back yard and into the house that was much cooler and sent a shiver through his sweat drenched body.

“Will,” Hannibal called as he rested Walter on a barstool at the kitchen island. “My medical kit, if you would.”

Walter wiped at the tears on his cheeks, but could feel only blood smear his skin, tacky and hot. A trail of blood went out the back door and there was a decent amount starting to puddle under his foot as it dripped down his leg, into his sock and shoe before finally falling.

“You got yourself pretty good, didn’t you?” Will asked Hannibal as he entered the kitchen with Hannibal’s large black medical bag in tow. He let it drop onto the counter and stepped around the bar stool to look carefully over Walter.

“He’s getting better,” Hannibal answered with a nod, washing his hands in the kitchen sink.

Walter looked up into his dad’s blue eyes and Will gave a half smile. “We’ll get you cleaned up. Don’t worry.”

Walter nodded, not wanting to say a word either way. He just wanted the pain in his knee to stop. He wanted the swelling to go down and the pulsing to come to an end. But he supposed that this was what he deserved for what he had done. Hannibal was right. He had gone about it all in the wrong way. He had damaged their chances of living here and if he was old enough to do that, then he was old enough to deal with the consequences of them possibly being found because of his stupidity.

“Walter, would you mind letting me know where all of my kitchenware has run off to?” Hannibal asked as he dug through his pack and pulled out several items. “I do need it to make dinner.”

“Backyard, by the wood,” Walter replied softly.

“Maybe while you’re stuck home this week, we can work on the plans for that,” Will suggested, leaning over and pressing a kiss to Walter’s sweat damp hair. “It will make Morgan incredibly happy.” Walter gave a small nod and Will stepped back. “I think I’ll go get Morgan.”

“He’ll probably be just waking up,” Hannibal said as he stepped around the chair, face washed clean, though the cut on his nose was starting to bead with blood again, and entered Walter’s space, kneeling and disregarding the blood he had set his knees in. “He’ll be a bit disorientated and perhaps a little nauseous. Be gentle with him.”

“Alright.” Will gave Walter another small smile and patted his shoulder.

# Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

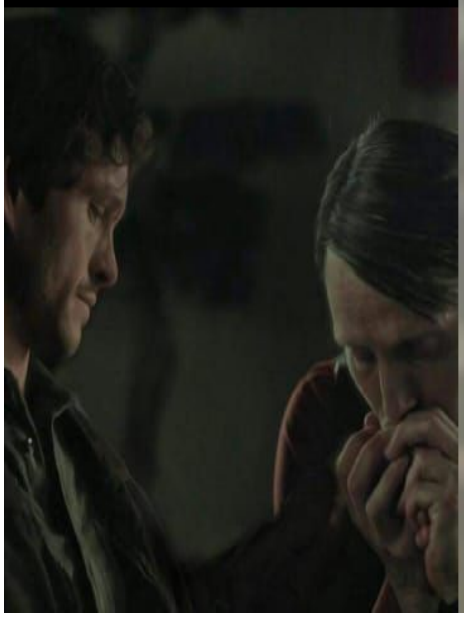
“I thought you didn’t like sleeping in the same bed.”

“Stop talking,” Walter ordered slowly. “Tonight’s different.”

Chapter Notes

Idk whose art this is, so if you know, let me know so I can give credit.

# The Silence Of The Lecters



Morgan stared up at the dark ceiling, listening to Walter's slow and level breathing and trying hard not to move so that he wouldn't hurt Walter's knee. He couldn't seem to find sleep and he blamed the medicine that he had taken earlier that day to be the cause of it.

Outside Morgan could hear the city life still running rampant with people talking, boats passing by their villa and that only made it that much more difficult to try to relax. He hadn't been lying. The city sounds were annoying on a good day and hard to tune out.

"Shut up," Walter grumbled, breathing coming back to life. He turned in his bed and Morgan was snatched up and pulled against him like a stuffed animal.

"I didn't say anything," Morgan argued, adjusting himself to Walter's tight embrace.

"You were thinking and it's loud." Walter nuzzled his face into Morgan's neck and Morgan shivered over the warm breath that brushed against his skin.

"One can't really stop thinking, can one?" Morgan asked back innocently and there was a hot snort of laughter against his neck. Walter shook his head with a yawn, somehow pulling Morgan even closer. Morgan gave a small sigh. "I thought you didn't like sleeping in the same bed."

"Stop talking," Walter ordered slowly, one hand playing with Morgan's hair, the other brushing up and down the length of Morgan's forearm. "Tonight's different."

"Why is tonight different? I sleep with you every night. What could have possibly-" the rest of his sentence was muffled as Walter's hand clapped over his mouth and there was another chuckle from Walter.

"Just go to sleep, will you? I'm tired." Walter sighed as Morgan tried to speak again under Walter's hand. "Smart ass," he muttered as he pulled his hand back.

"I was forced to sleep all day."

"You were-" Walter gave another yawn, the breath tickling Morgan's hair against his neck. "-sleeping all day? What about school?"

"It was school," Morgan whispered, carefully trying to push at Walter's body to release its hold. Even with the AC that Will had installed, the summer heat was in the room and Walter's skin always ran hot as if it were ablaze with flames. "Wally, let go."

Walter shook his head, strong arms clutching even tighter to the struggling boy. "You hold onto me every night, it's only fair that you return the favor."

"It's hot," Morgan mumbled, once more trying to pull from Walter's grip. He stopped struggling when Walter dutifully pulled the blanket off them, cool air rushing over Morgan's skin. He sighed and once more relaxed into Walter's grip, knowing he didn't have the chance to escape if Walter didn't want him to.

"Why was sleeping a school assignment? Maybe I should have stayed homeschooled."

"Father thinks I should gain a tolerance to drugs."

Walter gave a snort and shook his head. "That's stupid," he mumbled. "No one would dare try to drug you."

"Why not?"

"You're not one of those partying types of people. You wouldn't go getting yourself into trouble on purpose."

"Partying?" Morgan asked curiously.

"Yeah." Walter pushed himself up onto his elbow, sleep most likely gone. He gave Morgan a small smile. "You know, like ones that Gatsby would throw."

"Those are real?" Morgan asked, eyes widening and putting a smile into Walter's face.

"Kind of. Not exactly like those, but they exist," Walter explained. "You have to pay to go to some of them. And they aren't classy like Gatsby's. They're full of druggies and criminals and sluts."

"Slut?" Morgan tipped his head to the side.

"Uh..." Walter bit his bottom lip. "It's someone who..." He sighed. "Someone who tries to take physical advantages of someone else."

"Physical? Are we sluts?"

Walter burst into bright laughter and fell back into the bed. Morgan's hand rested itself over Walter's chest to feel the rumbling movement.

"No," Walter whispered. "No. Physical, like sexual."

"Sexual," Morgan repeated, tasting the world. "What does that mean?"

Walter's laughing stopped and he glanced back down at Morgan who had curled up against his side. His fingers found Morgan's hair and played with it.

"You might be a little young for that."

"Why does everyone always say that?" Morgan's tone was bitter. "I've killed someone, I'm not a child."

Walter's movements froze as he took in the boy's truth. “You might be a little young for this,” Walter tried once more, only getting an annoyed huff from the boy.

“I’m old enough to learn how to properly set a bone, forge signatures on documents, clean up DNA from a room and obtain a tolerance to drugs, but I’m not old enough to learn what that word means?” Morgan grumbled, turning away from Walter. The bed shifting made Walter hiss in pain as his knee moved with the mattress. “I’m old enough to shoot a gun and learn where to most effectively cut open a person with a knife, but I’m not old enough to-”

“Kid, stop,” Walter grumbled with a pained breath.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to hit your knee.” Morgan glanced over his shoulder and his eyes held a worried shine. Walter shook his head and carefully turned away from Morgan, hands folded over

his bare chest as he stared up at the ceiling. “Please tell me, Wally.”

Walter chewed on his cheek for a moment before his head tipped to the side to look over Morgan. “Father and Dad would kill me if I told you. I’m sure they’d rather tell you.”

“Did they tell you?”

Walter’s brows furrowed in disgust, and he shook his head. “No. God. I kinda already knew, but they taught me in one of my classes at school. I hope our parents never do. I don’t know if I could handle that.”

That seemed to pull Morgan’s interest up another notch because he turned back towards Walter and his hand rested on Walter’s chest to hold him up to look down onto Walter’s face. Walter blinked up at him for a moment and sighed.

“Kid, please just go to sleep.”

“Tell me,” Morgan pushed. “I want to know.”

“I’m sure you could find it in some textbooks of Father’s if you searched hard enough.” Walter closed his eyes with a deep breath and settled further into the bed. “Stop asking. I’m tired.”

“Wally,” Morgan said sternly. When Walter didn’t answer, Morgan frowned. His hand turned to a fist and he lightly hit at Walter’s chest. “Wally, stop that.” There was still no answer or movement. “Wally, I know you’re not sleeping.” As if on cue, Walter let out a snore that was rather overly dramatic and only caused Morgan to groan. “Wally, I mean it. Tell me or I’m going to tell Dad.”

Walter’s lips ticked up into a smile and he opened one eye to look over Morgan before closing it again. “And what exactly are you planning on telling Dad?”

“That you were looking at bad pictures in those magazines,” Morgan said sharply and he could see the small crease between Walter’s brows.

“What pictures?” he challenged back.

“From the magazines you keep under your mattress,” Morgan answered coolly, watching the discomfort cross Walter’s face.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“They have to be bad or you wouldn’t hide them.” Morgan’s reasoning was spot on and Walter’s nose scrunched up. “I’ll tell Dad about them if you don’t explain what sexually means.”

Walter’s eyes opened and he glared at Morgan. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“Wouldn’t I?”

Walter’s eyes flickered over Morgan in disbelief for a moment before he sighed with a roll of his eyes. “You’re not supposed to use manipulation against me, you know,” he grumbled, pushing himself upright to lean against the wall and causing Morgan to sit up with a smug smile. He crossed his legs and waited patiently, eyes on Walter. “It’s meant for people outside of the family.”

“Consider this practice then.”

Walter frowned. “Sexual means...” His eyes went to the ceiling in thought and Morgan sat silently beside him, though there was an eager buzz around him that he normally got when he was learning something new. “It has to do with activities involving intimate physical contact between two people.”

“Can you use it in a sentence?” Morgan’s head tipped to the side and received a raised brow from Walter.

“This isn’t a spelling bee, kid.”

“I bet that Dad would love to know about the way you-”

“Alright,” Walter quickly interrupted. “Alright. Alright. I find women sexually attractive.”

Morgan’s brows rose lightly and he blinked. “It means you like someone.”

“It can.”

“So when a slut is being sexual, they just like you.”

“No.”

Morgan frowned, frustration clear on his face. “You’re not making any sense.”

“I don’t want to tell you, Einstein, but you’re kinda holding me hostage here!” Walter shot back before sighing deeply, head tipping back against the wall. “I can’t give you a whole anatomy lesson tonight. Please don’t make me. It’s just going to be awkward.”

“Why? Anatomy isn’t awkward.”

Walter sighed. “Look. There are things that a man and a woman can do with each other that are physically pleasurable and it works better if you think they're physically pretty to look at. So you don't have to like the person, you just have to like what they look like."

"A man and a woman?" Morgan tipped his head to the side.

"Yes," Walter replied with a small nod. "A man and a woman."

"Can...?" Morgan's nose scrunched up and his head tipped back in the other direction, deep in thought. "Just a man and a woman?"

"I guess not," Walter whispered, shifting uncomfortably. He didn't like the direction this was going. When Morgan had to know about something, he had to know every last thing about something, down to the very last detail.

"Because, my moms loved each other, didn't they?"

Walter frowned and gave a small nod. "I'm sure they did," he agreed.

"So, they could have made each other-"

"Yes," Walter interrupted quickly, trying to get Morgan through the subject as swiftly as possible. "Yes, they could."

"And what about men?"

"What about men?" Walter asked, shifting once more to the edge of the bed.

"Well, Dad and Father-"

"Them too," Walter said with a small groan. "Kid, please drop it. Please."

"Wally, can I ask you something?"

Walter sighed loudly, trying to show Morgan just how annoying he was being. "You're already asking me things, might as well."

"Is it..." Morgan trailed off and his eyes dropped down to his hands in his lap. "Is it normal for a boy to like a boy?"

Walter shrugged with a roll of his eyes, but stopped when he looked closer at Morgan. His head was lowered and a blush was over his cheeks. His fingers fidgeted and his body was stiff.

*Oh.*

"Who do you like, Einstein?" Walter asked, letting a smile come to his face. He reached out a hand to ruffle Morgan's hair.

"No one," Morgan whispered, reaching up to try to stop Walter's hand. "Wally, knock it off."

"Tell me!" Walter pushed, letting his hand fall back to his lap. This was a far safer conversation than sex was. He could play with this. "Who do you have a crush on?"

"Wally," Morgan grumbled. "Stop."

"Not until you tell me," Walter said, reaching out and poking Morgan in the side. Morgan jumped with a small squeak and a glare. "Tell me."

Morgan rolled his eyes and sighed. "Nonna Pia has a grandson that came to visit this afternoon. I was still mostly out of it, but... I liked him. Or liked how he looked."

"What was his name?"

Morgan's brow scrunched up. "I don't remember." Morgan's face relaxed and he gave a small shrug. “But he had this really curly blonde hair and these blue eyes that were pretty."

Walter gave a small smile and reached out a hand to once more ruffle Morgan's hair that was certainly going to be cut soon. It was getting far longer than what Hannibal liked it at, something about giving an assailant less to grab onto, despite the fact that he and Will kept their hair decently long.

"We'll have to ask what his name is the next time we go over there." Walter grinned. "Won't we?"

Another blush came to Morgan's cheeks. "That's not weird?"

"No," Walter assured softly. "Not at all."

"But David called Dad and Father-"

"I know what he called them and it wasn't ok. You can like or not like whoever you want. There's nothing wrong with you liking a boy or a girl or whatever's in between."

"Between?" Morgan questioned.

"Another time," Walter assured. "I promise I'll explain more another time."

"But Wally-"

"Lay down and let's try to sleep, alright? You might not be tired, but I am and we need to be up for school soon."

Morgan gave a small nod and repositioned himself in the bed as Walter had instructed. Walter lowered himself back down and sighed, eyes closing and hands once more folded over his chest.

"We're both getting a little old for this, don't you think?" Walter asked. Morgan kept his attention to the wall he faced, silent. "You don't have nightmares anymore. Shouldn't you sleep in your own bed?"

"You have nightmares though," Morgan muttered. "And I know how you get with nightmares."

"I'm sure I can handle my nightmares on my own. You need to sleep in your own bed tomorrow."

"Tonight?"

Morgan jumped as he was once more snatched up and pulled against Walter. "I told you that tonight was different," Walter reminded softly, breath hot against the back of Morgan's neck. "I need something good to distract from what happened today."

"And I'm something good?" Morgan found himself asking, shocked at the kind thing that Walter had said. Walter was always kind, but his words were normally double sided and harsher.

"When you're not being annoying."

Morgan felt a small smile pull at his lips. That was a bit more like it. A bit more like Walter. A bit more than the distant body that had taken over Walter since they had moved from Germany.

He let his hand tangle with Walter's and he closed his eyes. "What was so bad about today?"

"I got in a fight at school. I'll be home for the next few days."

"You will?" Morgan asked, unable to hide his excitement.

"I'm going to try to work on your tree house."

"You will?!" Morgan squirmed until he was facing Walter who had a tired smile on his face. Walter hummed in answer and Morgan couldn't stop the grin from covering his face. "Thank you, Wally."

Walter's eyes flickered open at a kiss against his cheek. He glanced down at the boy who hid himself against Walter's chest.

"Your own bed tomorrow," Walter muttered, closing his eyes once more.

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"This is bullshit," Walter hissed between his teeth. Morgan looked up from the work he was doing, to find Walter gulping down some water and leaning against his shovel for balance as the hole they stood in was slowly beginning to reach up to Walter's knees. "Fucking bullshit."

"Why?" Morgan asked curiously, wiping the sweat from his head and wandering over to Walter who held out the water bottle. Morgan took it and sucked down the cool liquid.

"Why do you just go along with whatever they tell you to do, huh?" Walter shot back, sitting on the edge of the hole they were digging out in the middle of some field in some random part of Italy. "You never question what they say. Never try to use your head. You just blindly follow."

"They've never done anything to us, Wally." Morgan set the bottle of water aside. "I'm not sure what it is you're trying to say."

"Would you use your brain for once, Einstein?" Walter rolled his eyes and spit into the hole that was being dug. "This isn't some punishment."

"What is it then?" Morgan made his way back over to his side of the hole and started digging again.

Walter followed suit, but at a bad twist, his knee gave way and he fell into the dirt with a cry. Morgan dropped his shovel and rushed over to Walter who was clutching to his knee with a clenched jaw and a panting breath.

"Wally, are you alright?" Morgan lowered himself to his knees and glanced over the child in the dirt. He reached out a hand but pulled it back swiftly at Walter's biting order through tight teeth.

"Don't touch me!"

Morgan once more looked over Walter, trying to figure out exactly what to do. "Dad told you to be careful. Not to over work yourself. You should rest, Wally."

"I hate this!" Walter nearly screamed and Morgan's eyes widened. He had seen Walter show emotion before, normally hidden away in his room at night when he had nightmares, but a frightened terror was different than full on anger. "I fucking hate this! All of it!" A fist connected with the dirt several times, sending small bits of brown to scatter. "I miss Wolf Trap. I want my mom!"

There was a sob and Morgan stared as the kid who had always been so strong, always been so safe and the better of the two of them crumbled into a crying mess. His tears ran down his cheeks and mixed with the dirt on his cheeks to make tracks of mud.

"I want my mom," Walter whispered, breath caught in his chest, stuttering. Morgan sat helpless beside Walter, entirely unsure of what to do. With a small hand, Morgan reached out and gently brushed his fingers through Walter's short hair. "I want my mom."

"It's ok, Wally," Morgan whispered, hand continuing to push at the dirt covered locks. "You rest and I'll keep digging. Father and Dad will be back soon with some lunch and Father can look over your knee."

"I don't want to keep digging." Walter inhaled shakily and one of his hands left his knee to wipe at the mud on his cheeks. "I meant it. Use your brain. Why are we digging?"

Morgan was quiet as he continued to pet at Walter's hair. His mind thought over what Will had instructed them to do while Hannibal waited at the road for Will to return to his side. Will had given them measurements of how big to dig the hole and Morgan wasn't sure why it hadn't occurred to him before.

His hand stopped and he blinked as the information set into him and now he understood exactly what Walter meant about questioning everything that their parents did. There was reasoning behind all of it and normally it was explained to Morgan after he had obeyed, so he hadn’t thought too much about this particular task. Will and Hannibal always gave them weird tasks to complete.

"They're making us dig a grave," Morgan muttered, feeling like the air had been sucked from his lungs. "Why?"

Walter sat up with a deep breath, once more wiping at his cheeks, his breathing far more even. "Why do you think?"

Morgan paled and he curled his knees into his chest. He hid his face into his knees, the summer heat no longer a bother as a chill ran through him.

"Look," Morgan whispered. "I'm not stupid. I know what they do when they go out. I've known for a long time, Wally." Morgan slowly glanced up to find a curious look on Walter's face. "It's not difficult to put two and two together."

"Are you asking if we're digging them a grave for one of their kills?" Walter asked softly. Morgan's eyes widened as his suspicions were finally confirmed, something heavy fixing itself to his chest. He licked his lips with a small nod, hands clutching tightly to his legs. "They wouldn't be stupid enough to bury one of their kills." Walter winced as he sat up more fully. One of his hands still held to the bandaging of his knee. "Are you ok? You look pale."

"Fine," Morgan dismissed quickly, willing his stomach to untwist. "If it's not for one of their kills, then what's it for?"

"Us."

Morgan felt his blood turn icy and a panic set in, causing his heart to race. Walter's face turned from something pained to worry.

"No!" he quickly corrected. "Einstein, not like that. You're right. They wouldn't do anything to hurt us."

"If they aren't-"

"It's a test. I wouldn't be surprised if they drugged us again." Walter gave a small shrug. "But you should be getting better with that, shouldn't you?"

"I..." Morgan trailed off with a small sigh, looking at the dirt under his shoes. “It’s only been a few days. I’m not anywhere near a tolerance yet. I can pick out a lot of chemicals now though.”

“That’s a good start,” Walter assured with a kind smile. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

Morgan gave a small shrug. “You really should be resting. You shouldn’t be on that knee right now.”

“I’m sure it’s just God trying to teach me a lesson.”

Morgan tipped his head to the side. “Do you believe in God, Wally?”

There was a snort from Walter and the teen shook his head. “Not even a little bit.” Morgan was silent, looking over the sweaty, dirty boy whose golden eyes still held mild discomfort in them. “Not after everything that he’s done to me.”

They were quiet for another moment or two and Walter sighed, reaching for his shovel and using it to hoist himself from the dirt and to his feet. His hand took the edge of the hole and he sat down, letting his head rest in his hands.

Morgan got back to his feet too and stopped at a car that was pulling up to the field they were in. Morgan’s head tipped to the side as he watched Will and Hannibal step from the car, pulling from the backseat what looked like a blanket and a picnic basket.

“They’re back,” Morgan whispered. “Why did they make us walk all the way out here if they were going to go rent a car?”

“Probably to tire us out,” Walter replied, looking up from his hands. “They’ll expect us to not be on our guards.”

“You really think they’ll drug the food again?” Morgan questioned, taking Walter’s outstretched hand to help pull him from the hole, sitting beside Walter.

“Just don’t eat anything unless Will or Hannibal eats it first.”

“That didn’t work for the soup.”

Walter gave a small smile and ruffled at Morgan’s hair. “Go help them. I’ll be over in a bit.”

Morgan nodded and got to his feet, turning and making his way through the tall green grass over to Hannibal and Will. He reached out and took the blanket from Will’s grip, Will’s now free hand immediately going to Morgan’s head to caress it in the way that it always did. Morgan didn’t find that he could often connect to Will. There wasn’t much between them for him to clasp to, but at least he knew Will cared about him. The little touches were what showed him that. Almost reminded him of the way one of his moms would touch him. Just a little something to remind Morgan that they were there.

“Wally hurt his knee,” Morgan muttered. “Fell over.”

“Will, would you and *kleiner hase* set up lunch, please? I’ll check on the boy.”

Will took the basket from Hannibal’s hand and watched as his husband stepped away through the field and to where the very top of their son’s head could be seen above the grass. Morgan followed Will over to where a fig tree stood, one of its rather large branches being supported with a wooden post to keep the tree from falling under its own weight.

Morgan made quick work of setting out the blanket and made sure to keep his eye on Will once both of them were sitting down in the shade of the fig tree. Will pulled items from the basket. Some

olives, grapes, apricots and peaches. Then some cheese and bread and some nuts. Something nice and light. Nothing made by Hannibal. Nothing that put Morgan directly on edge.

Will opened the small bag of almonds and ate a few before holding the bag out to Morgan. Morgan slowly reached out a hand to take the offering, munching on a few of the almonds, but not daring to touch anything else until either one of their parents did. And the almonds tasted fine. There was nothing inherently wrong with them.

That was a breath of air. Morgan was tired of the way that food had been tasting off lately. Entirely too salty or bitter. And he absolutely hated the way his head felt completely foggy when he woke up.

Morgan looked up to find Hannibal slowly making their way towards them, supporting a wobbling Walter. Walter was rested on the blanket beside Morgan and Morgan held out the bag of almonds to the boy. Walter looked over the bag carefully before taking it and eating a single almond.

Hannibal took a seat beside Will and Morgan couldn't help but smile at the odd sight. It wasn't often that Morgan saw Hannibal wear anything other than his best suits. It had to have been a shield for the man, or some sort of comfort, Morgan had reasoned. But today Hannibal was in light pants and a short sleeved, white canvas button up shirt that would have helped keep the heat off of him.

Of course the clothes were odd, but they held nothing over the fact that Hannibal sat on the ground with the three of them. Morgan had never known the man to do more than kneel when speaking to one of them before he was once more back on his feet. Even when Will would join them on the ground in the backyard, Hannibal would stand or stay in a chair on the porch. He never fully engaged.

"Walter, we're going to take a look over your knee when we get home. It shouldn't be buckling like that. I would hate for you to have torn something," Hannibal announced, reaching out for the loaf of bread to pull a chunk from it. Morgan waited for the food to touch Hannibal's lips before he reached out for the bread and ripped off a small piece for himself, handing it to Walter when he was done.

"Yes, sir," Walter answered with a nod, passing the loaf to Will when he was finished tearing off his piece.

"You boys seem like you've made good progress," Will said with a grin, a hand reaching out to brush dirt from Morgan's cheeks. "You definitely look like you've made some progress."

Morgan didn't pull from Will's grip, something gentle in the touch while those blue water eyes kept Morgan at bay. He could never read Will exactly. Walter seemed to have the power to read minds. It boggled Morgan in the same way that Will's abilities boggled him. He could read Hannibal a little easier, but, once more, was nothing like Walter.

Morgan could recall the lesson in vivid detail. A lesson that Will had given in their classroom rather than out in nature. A lesson where they were instructed to clear their minds, end all of their internal monologue and to stick themselves into another person's skin. Sink deep into the other person's essence, let the other person wash over them until they could embody that other person.

Morgan had tried. He really had. He had tried to suppress his own emotional responses enough to feel another's. He had tried to silence his own thoughts to take in another's. He had tried to listen fully and completely. Tried to read a person's nonverbal cues, their body language, and their poster

to understand their emotions, but Morgan just couldn't seem to quite grasp it to the same depth that Walter had been able to.

That wasn't to say that he couldn't see things or read people. He absolutely could. He could read the distrust off Walter as if Walter were shouting through a blow horn. He could see the way that Will looked a little uncomfortable. Nothing to the extent that he had the night that they had eaten that soup, but the same sickly paleness was over his cheeks. And Hannibal was as put together as he always was, shell a little thicker than normal. He always closed off a bit more when they were learning something important that could injure them, and he didn't want to be emotionally involved.

Morgan looked back to the car curiously. Why did his parents need a car? They didn't care much for them. Didn't use them unless they were taking a long trip. There was no use for them when they lived right on the water. Even in Germany, Hannibal had only used a car to get to work. They walked everywhere else they possibly needed.

*Would you use your brain for once, Einstein?*

*If it's not for one of their kills, then what's it for?*

*Us.*

"Is there a coffin in the car?" Morgan asked, calling everyone's eyes to him and causing him to feel rather small. Hannibal's mouth ticked into a smile and Will's hands stilled in grabbing some grapes. Walter on the other hand looked rather unimpressed, as if he had known all along. "Is there?"

"Yes," Hannibal replied with a small nod.

"Did you drug the food?" Morgan asked, nose scrunched up in dislike.

"Have I drugged the food?" Hannibal asked back, brows raised in question.

"No," Morgan answered softly. "You want us awake the whole time."

"This is as much about controlling anxieties and phobias as it is about knowing what to do if you find yourself in this predicament," Hannibal explained simply.

"When are we ever going to use this?" Walter asked out under his breath with a roll of his eyes.

"Being buried alive is not something that we foresee in the future," Will answered softly, a hand reaching out to rest on Walter's uninjured knee. Morgan watched curiously. Will really had gotten better with touching. Morgan could remember the first few months together where Will was as reclusive as rural Ireland. He stayed far away from Morgan, but Morgan didn't find it terribly horrible. Walter was always there beside him and Hannibal was kind. "What your father and I are wanting to know is where your threshold for anxiety inducing situations lie. You both handled yourselves well enough in Germany, but this will show us how you handle the smaller things that are more likely to happen."

"Smaller things," Morgan muttered, tasting the words. He looked down at the blanket and played with a loose thread. "Like small spaces and limited oxygen."

“Like small spaces and limited oxygen,” Hannibal agreed. “We’ll finish digging the hole and Walter will go first.”

Morgan glanced over to Walter whose shoulders had stiffened up exponentially. Morgan could feel the guilt turn his stomach, the asiago not sitting very well anymore. Walter always had to go first. Walter was always the guinea pig, the test subject, the one who had to be strong.

*I want my mom!*

Morgan hadn’t heard that complaint from Walter since Pennsylvania. Not even when Walter woke from whatever demons plagued him at night did he call out for his mother. Morgan wasn’t even sure if he knew Walter’s mother’s name.

“I could go-”

“No,” Will interrupted with a gentle smile, brushing back a curl that the warm summer breeze had blown into his face. “Walter will go first and teach you exactly what he did.”

“I can figure it out,” Morgan pressed, calling surprised golden eyes to him. “Really. I can go first.”

“When you’re older,” Hannibal offered in his normally calm tone with the same excuse that he used for everything. The same excuse that everyone used for everything. When you’re older. You’re too young for that. Maybe in a few years.

“I’m not a child,” Morgan argued with a frown.

“You’re six,” Walter huffed out. “A child is exactly what you are.”

Morgan growled and shot Walter a dark look. He didn’t need Walter to always protect him. He was going to go through the same exact thing that Walter was, why did he have to go second?

“I always have a reason, *kleiner hase*,” Hannibal called out, causing Morgan’s face to soften as he regarded the older man. “Why would I need your brother to go first in this?”

Morgan could feel the bitten back words from Walter, the normal argument that they were not brothers, would never be brothers, they were simply friends. Best friends that got to live together. Never, absolutely ever brothers. But the words stayed behind bitten lips and Morgan was left to answer Hannibal’s question.

“Are we going to be nailed into the coffin?” Morgan questioned, once more picking at the thread in the blanket. He saw Hannibal nod in his peripherals. “You need Walter to go first so that the strength in his legs is enough to help him get out and he’s going to break the wood so that it’ll be easier for me to get out when it comes to it.”

“Very good,” Hannibal praised. He cleared his throat and rose to his knees. “Walter, would you help your Dad pick up lunch? Morgan, you and I will continue digging while Walter rests.”

“Ok,” Morgan answered, getting to his feet and starting off through the tall grass that he could barely see over. He could hear Hannibal following behind him, but he didn’t stop until he had jumped back into the hole and gathered up his shovel again. “You really don’t think we’ll be buried alive, do you?”

Hannibal lowered himself into the hole as well, his light colored shoes immediately dirty. Hannibal picked up Walter's shovel and began working. His eyes flickered up to Morgan and Morgan quickly started digging again.

"No," was Morgan's answer. "I don't expect you to have to deal with something of the sort. This is simply an exercise that we might revisit."

"How often will we revisit it?" Morgan hesitantly asked, pausing in his work to look at the larger amount of progress that Hannibal had been making than he could.

"Until you are able to accomplish the task without issues."

That was another of Hannibal's favorite answers. Morgan knew it like the back of his hand. They worked until they got it right. They worked for perfection. They worked not until they got it right, but until they couldn't get it wrong. That was how it had always been from the beginning and that's exactly how it would be going forward.

"Wally said he got in a fight," Morgan muttered, trying to change the conversation away from the gloom that it held. "Did he hurt someone? Is that why he's home?"

"Yes. He hurt someone."

"I'm sure the kid deserved it." The words made Hannibal pause, but Morgan kept working, trying his best to dig in the dirt that was starting to become decently rocky.

"What gives you that impression?"

"Wally's too nice to do something mean like that without a reason." Morgan gave a small shrug. "The kid must have done something wrong."

"Very intuitive, Morgan."

# Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Each sound was thunderous, a God filling the sky with the angriest of storms. A pattern of sound encasing them through the darkness. It didn't take quite as long as Morgan thought it would for Walter's hands to clutch at him, pull him tight like a stuffed animal.

# The Silence Of The Lecters

It took until the afternoon sun had died away and the air had cooled for the hole to be finished. Walter had been instructed to rest and eventually Morgan was hoisted up and out of the hole to make room for Will who made much better use of the shovel than Morgan could. Both pulled themselves out and dusted themselves off before heading back for the car that was catching the evening sunset on its hood.

Morgan sat beside Walter who had been playing with the long grass for a while now. Morgan glanced over the mess in Walter's hands and gave a small smile at the braided pattern that he had made from the tall green grass. He always had been better with knots.

"Are you going to be ok?" Morgan asked softly. Walter just gave a shrug and continued winding the greenery into itself. "I know you don't like small spaces very much."

"I'll get over it. I'll have to." Walter's eyes flickered up and he held up the braided field for a moment in front of Morgan before going back to work on it. "Just ignore it and you'll be fine."

"Do you have any idea how to climb out of a grave?"

"Not a one. I'll figure it out." Morgan was about to comment on Walter's normal stubborn detachment from situations, but Walter once more held up the item in his hands and Morgan blinked as it was set on his head. Walter gave a small smile that held worry in it. "You look like a prince."

Morgan's nose scrunched up and he brought a hand up to touch what had been placed on his head. A crown made from weaved grasses. "A prince?" he asked back, trying to pull the crown from his head, but Walter's hand stopped it. "You're being stupid again, Wally."

"Perhaps I am," he muttered with a small sigh, looking back at his dirt covered hands that were both now in his lap. "Forgive me."

"Wally-"

Morgan words were cut off as the grass beside them was displaced by a large wooden box. He simply watched as Will pushed the lid off the rest of the wood with his foot and pulled tools from inside of it. He turned back to both Walter and Morgan with a deep breath and nodded towards the box.

Walter licked at his lips and pushed himself up to his feet, stumbling just slightly as he put weight on his knee. He made his way over to the coffin and climbed into it, lowering himself until he lay flat in it and Morgan pushed himself up onto his knees to look over the side and to where a blank faced Walter lay.

"You should have upwards of two hours of oxygen if you keep your breathing controlled," Hannibal explained as if this were an everyday occurrence. "Once you are completely buried we will give you twenty minutes to get out. If you are not out by then, we will unbury you. If you need something, text one of us. I trust you have your phone."

"Yes," Walter muttered, eyes dead set on the blue sky above him as if trying to burn it into his memory, as if he were never going to see it again.

“Morgan, move out of the way please,” Will instructed kindly and Morgan obeyed, getting to his feet, and stepping back to watch as Hannibal and Will lifted up the wooden lid and placed it over the top of Walter.

“Wait,” Walter’s voice called, muffled through the wood. Both Will and Hannibal paused, and Morgan could hear a sharp breath in the coffin. “I’m not ready.”

“You’re not going to be ready,” Will scolded lightly, but Morgan could see the pain in his dad’s blue eyes.

Will didn’t like this in the slightest. The large tests were always ones that Will disliked, but that Hannibal insisted in. Morgan couldn’t exactly tell how Hannibal felt about the process, but there was leniency in his movements, tipping the lid of the wood open to look over Walter, whose hands had clawed into the wood under him and whose eyes were squeezed shut tightly.

“Breathe *Mangustėli*,” Hannibal instructed kindly. “If you remember your breathing, you will be fine. *Vires acquirit eundo*.” *(He gains strength by going.)*

Morgan took a curious step forward and as if called directly to, those golden eyes opened to look at him, terror flooding them. He hated that look in Walter’s eyes. Hated how deeply Walter took everything while somehow still being as cold as stone. They wouldn’t be sleeping separately tonight. There was no way that Walter would let them sleep separate. Walter needed Morgan just as much as Morgan needed him. There was simply nothing else to it.

“Ok,” Walter whispered with a small nod, letting his head rest back against the wood beneath him with a small thud. He licked his lips, eyes falling closed again. “This can’t be worse than the lake, right?”

Morgan shuttered at the idea of the lake. He hated water. Had since he was a child, always would, he was sure. He hadn’t been able to do that exercise, nearly throwing up with how much he hated being near any body of water larger than a bathtub, and even that would cause his skin to crawl.

He hadn’t been tied and gagged and thrown over the side of a boat with a weight tied to his legs. The water hadn’t been too horribly deep, and Will had been ready to jump in if anything went wrong, Morgan clinging far too tightly to Hannibal’s legs to allow the man to move. They knew Walter’s lung capacity. They knew how long he could stay safe under the light waves. Safety was always put in place. One or both of them were ready to react in an instant, but that hadn’t stopped the way that Walter came back above water, sputtering and gasping and coughing. The way Walter was trembling from the cold and how, the moment he was back on-board Will’s boat, he was tied up again, this time with more complicated knots and given a moment to catch his breath before he was tossed into the water once more to do it all again.

Walter wasn’t given an answer. The wood lid was placed over him once more and Morgan could only watch as both Will and Hannibal began to nail the lid down. The thumps filled the evening air, sometimes the ring of metal on metal, but they wouldn’t be bothered. Hardly anyone came down this road. Morgan was certain he had only seen one other car besides his parents’ that whole day. No one would interrupt. No one would come out here wondering why a teen boy had been closed into a wooden crate and lowered into the ground with the task of getting out.

It wasn’t until the third or fourth thudding of a shovel full of dirt over the wooden box that Morgan could finally feel and hear the panic from inside of the grave they had dug. A cry, a plea, a beg to

be let out. Small whimpers that stilled Will's hands more than once before the man found a determined strength to press on.

"You need to learn how to get out of there," Will pressed as if trying to convince himself and Morgan licked his lips, a hand reaching up to pull the small crown from his head. He worried at it as the cries got louder, nearly screams, until the carefully crafted grass fell apart in his nervous fingers.

Hands pounded against the wood, echoing Morgan's heart beats and he stepped closer, letting the ruined crown drop from his hands. "Stop," he ordered, causing the sound of metal on dirt to come to a halt. Both sets of his parents' eyes came to rest on him and he glanced between them before looking down into the hole that was partially filled back in. "Bring him back up."

"Morgan-"

"Bring him back up," Morgan interrupted Hannibal.

Hannibal frowned, eyes narrowing, but Will was swift to jump down into the hole with a hammer. Will pushed at the dirt over the wooden lid and then began to slowly work the nails free until the lid could be lifted fully.

Morgan leaned over the edge of the grave, looking into the box where a tear-stained little boy lay, sobbing. He could see Walter trying to compose himself, wiping at the tears on his cheeks and breathing deeply.

"You said we would revisit this?" Morgan asked, looking over at Hannibal who was watching the situation in a silence that Morgan couldn't exactly place. A nod was his answer.

Morgan didn't reply. When something was set, it was set. It didn't matter how much they begged for it to be changed, they were going to learn this lesson. Even if they weren't buried, they would be shoved into something else just like it until they learned to control their anxieties in the way that Hannibal and Will wanted.

Morgan inhaled deeply, hands feeling a bit sweaty, but that didn't stop him from dropping down into the hole beside Will who gave a curious look at the young boy. Morgan looked over Walter for a moment to see confusion on his face. Walter was always strong. Always embodied strength. Morgan could be that for Walter too. Walter had helped him through the forest as they found their way back home, had carried him across the river and kept him calm. Morgan could help Walter swim this metaphoric sea.

Morgan carefully climbed up and over the side of the coffin and sat down, causing Walter to shift from the middle of the coffin and more towards the side. Morgan lied down next to Walter and closed his eyes with a deep breath.

"It's going to be harder for the two of you to get out," Hannibal informed, no sway either way in his voice.

"Twenty minutes?" Morgan asked, receiving no answer from either of his parents. The answer was *yes*. He didn't need the confirmation. He opened his eyes and looked over Walter who had shifted to his side to regard Morgan with wet eyes. Morgan gave him a small smile and watched as those golden eyes faded when the lid was placed over the top of them.

Each sound was thunderous, a God filling the sky with the angriest of storms. A pattern of sound encasing them through the darkness. It didn't take quite as long as Morgan thought it would for Walter's hands to clutch at him, pull him tight like a stuffed animal.

Walter's breathing was stuttered in his chest, his heart so incredibly loud in Morgan's ear that was pressed to Walter's chest. Whimpers pulled from Walter and Morgan hugged Walter back, hand gently caressing over Walter's back.

"You're going to use up all the oxygen if you keep breathing like that," Morgan tried to tease, but it did nothing to settle Walter. "Slow, Wally." Morgan's hand moved to rest on Walter's chest, feeling the stammering rise and fall. There was a pressure settling in around them as dirt continued to be shoveled over them, though the sound was slowly growing more distant now. "You need to slow your breathing, Wally. Come on."

"How the fuck are you so fucking calm?" Walter demanded in a ragged voice.

"They won't let anything happen to us," Morgan replied, adding a bit more pressure to Walter's chest with his palm in hopes that it would help.

"I don't fucking think you're quite grasping the fucking point of this bullshit exercise." Walter's words were tormented, broken apart by whines, hands nearly painful on the grip that held to Morgan.

"Hum a song, Wally," Morgan offered gently, hand petting over Walter's chest. "A song always makes me feel better. Hum something."

"Stupid." There was another loud gasp and sob from the boy and Morgan gave a small breath.

"Hum something. It will help your breathing."

Morgan went silent after that. There was only so much he could do for Walter. Walter had to do the rest on his own. Walter had to control himself on his own. It took another moment or two for Walter to steady his breathing enough to hum out a small note, hiding his face in Morgan's hair as he did so.

"Good, Wally," Morgan soothed gently. "Everything's alright."

Soon the thundering of the earth above them fell silent and all that was left were Walter's broken notes of a song that Morgan was sure he would be able to place in any other situation but couldn't at this precise moment name.

Morgan let the moment sit a bit longer before he carefully pulled from Walter's grip and lied on his back, hands reaching out to feel how far away the wood above them was in the dark. His hands immediately hit the wood and he frowned. There wouldn't be much room to maneuver, but it was doable. And now with Walter no longer hyperventilating, air could be conserved long enough to either escape or to let them be unburied, even with the two of them instead of just one of them.

Morgan blinked at a sudden bright light, and he glanced over at Walter who had turned on his phone's flashlight. He kept humming though, the tune much clearer now. Something from Lynyrd Skynyrd if Morgan had to guess and the tune was more contemplative and thoughtful now than it was afraid.

Walter's hand reached up and gently pressed to the wood above them, some of it splintering a bit under the weight of the dirt, but that was good. It would make it easier to break out, even if they had six feet of dirt to fight through.

Walter inhaled deeply and let it out slowly, finally able to push past the riddling anxiety attack and get the job done. He licked his lips and nodded. "Ok," Walter said, voice still cracking with fear. "Our legs are going to be stronger than anything else. The two of us should be able to get through this."

"What about the dirt?" Morgan questioned, his head tipping back to look at the grain in the wood. His finger traced some of it in thought. "It'll fall in on us. How do we breathe?"

Walter was quiet for a moment and Morgan glanced over to see his mind working a million miles a minute, eyes flickering over the coffin lid. He bit his bottom lip and ran a hand over his face in the cramped space.

"We're going to pull our shirts over our heads and tie the bottoms off. It'll be like using handkerchiefs when we went on that trip through the Błędów Desert and got hit with that little sandstorm."

"Alright." Morgan went to work then, grateful that he had worn a t-shirt that day. He lifted his hips and pulled at the hem of the shirt, lifting it up and over his head, making sure the neck was still around him. He tied off the bottom the best he could, ignoring the heat from his breath getting trapped in the fabric. That would be better than trying to breathe in dirt.

"I'm turning out the light," Walter explained before the world around Morgan was drenched once more in consuming darkness. Morgan was nearly certain he could feel Walter's body trembling through the wood of the box as he shifted beside Morgan, following Morgan's example with his own shirt. "Don't let the dirt cover you," Walter's muffled voice called out to Morgan. "Try to push it under your body."

"Is it going to hurt?"

"Hurt?" Walter asked with a small breath.

"The pressure from the dirt. Won't it hurt?" Morgan tipped his head to the side as if he could see, hands once more reaching out to feel at the wood, jumping when his finger hit a sharp splinter.

There was a thoughtful breath from Walter and a hum in agreement. "You have to shift the way the dirt's gonna be on you. You don't want to lay out flat. The second you're able to, straighten yourself upright like a pencil. It won't hurt your ribs as badly."

"You think we're going to break some ribs?" Morgan licked his lips.

He hadn't ever broken anything before. Not like Walter. It seemed like every few months Walter had something else broken on him. Granted it was usually a finger or a toe, his nose as of late, but Morgan really didn't want to experience the pain that would come with such an incident. Walter always played big, but he knew how badly it hurt Walter. How any touch to his elbow would somehow jolt his finger and nearly bring him to his knees.

"It's a possibility. Just try to pack the dirt under you so you can get out. The more you pack, the easier you'll be able to get leverage."

“But...” Morgan lowered his hands back to his sides, feeling Walter’s hand brush against his. “That will make it harder for you to get out.”

“You always come first, Einstein. Always have, always will.”

“But Wally-”

“Don’t argue with me,” Walter grumbled, clearly uncomfortable with the situation. Clearly not wanting to be in this place any longer than he had to. Resigned to make sure Morgan was fully and completely safe before he could think of himself. “When we kick at this wood, it’s going to break. We’re going to push it up enough to give you room to sit up and then you are going to push yourself up to the surface. Do you understand?”

“Wally-”

“Do you understand?”

Morgan sighed with a nod, though he knew it wouldn’t be seen. “Yes.” His heart was starting to stutter in his chest, and he jumped when he heard the first pounding of Walter’s feet against the wood. There was a pained moan. “Wally?”

“Are you going to fucking help me or not?” was Walter’s answer. Morgan did his best to pull his legs up and position them. “On three. One. Two. Three.”

Morgan took a deep breath and closed his eyes tightly even though he couldn’t see. He kicked at the wood as hard as he could and could hear it splinter and crack. Dirt fell onto his legs. Morgan did his best to shift on top of the dirt and could feel Walter doing the same beside him. It would pin them if they weren’t careful.

“One. Two. Three.”

Morgan kicked again and the wood gave way. Dirt dropped over the top of him, and he did his best to shove at what was pouring over his face under himself. Morgan reached out blindly until he found a piece of board and he pushed at it as hard as he could, creating enough room for himself to sit up before more dirt was knocked into his lap.

A strong pressure filled his chest as the weight of the dirt came down around him and a sense of dread set in. He was trapped. Couldn’t move. His arms felt tapped to his sides and he could barely get enough air into his lungs, the world feeling crushing and dizzy around him even in the darkness.

It was only six feet. That wasn’t very tall, Morgan reasoned. That was Hannibal’s height. If he stretched out his arms, he could reach Hannibal’s shoulders. It wasn’t much higher than that. If he could just somehow get upright and find a hold for his foot, then he could push himself up. It would be like rock climbing in Costa Brava. Or he hoped that was what it would be like.

Morgan did his best to shift his body and created enough room to pull his arms up and he did his best to use this to his advantage. He could push with his arms, using them to pack down enough dirt to allow him to fully stand up.

There was a sharpness in Morgan’s side that began to set in almost immediately as he angled his body in the right direction. It was unnerving the way that the strain pulled at his chest, making him

nearly want to cry out. Had he broken a rib? It wasn't nearly as blinding as he had thought it would be, so he doubted it.

It wasn't comfortable though. It was more like what Morgan would guess swimming through dirt felt like rather than it was like climbing. Just shifting dirt to make enough of a packed place to push up on.

His lungs ached and he was nearly certain that he might have been trying to move down rather than up until the evening's cool air licked at his fingertips, making his heart jump. He was right there. So close. It was enough to keep him sane. Enough to let Morgan know that he could make it.

With his arms free up to his elbows, he reached around to find purchase on anything stronger than loose dirt. Tall grass brushed at his fingertips, and he grabbed for it, snatching it up like his life depended on it, tearing at it. It was slow work and his arms ached, but when the cold air blew through his t-shirt and into his face, he cried.

Tears poured down his cheeks sticking the dirty shirt to his face as he struggled to free the rest of his body from the suffocating ground. Once he was free and on solid ground, surrounded by tall grass, he took at the fabric around his head, pulling it off and into the grass, greedily gulping at the night air, the summer breeze drying the tears on his cheeks.

He could panic now if he wanted to. He could cry and neither of his parents would tell him to relax or that it wasn't ok. This moment belonged to him as all moments after success did. The pain and the dread were his and he could own and explore them for a moment. He could sob uncontrollably, gasping as if he still couldn't breathe.

Morgan's hands seized up fistfuls of the grass, trying to anchor himself to something solid. Something that wasn't going to swallow him. He wasn't sure how long it took, but he finally had full control again. He could breathe. He could think. He stared up at the stars above him through damp lashes, taking in the empty quietness around him, the only sound being the wind blowing through the field. Nothing was out of place, nothing was wrong, the world was still turning and hadn't noticed that he had been trapped underground.

"Wally," Morgan whispered, pushing himself upright. He groaned, his ribs protesting, and his hand wrapped around his middle. He rolled to his knees and looked over the disturbed dirt for a moment, before his eyes flickered up to where Will and Hannibal stood, watching. Waiting. A steadying hand was on Will's shoulder to keep him in place and stop him from helping until their allotted time ran out.

Nausea made Morgan's head spin and he forced himself to keep the contents of his stomach down. Walter's fingertips had just barely appeared at the surface of the earthy lake and Morgan moved closer, digging at the dirt without a second thought. Each breath and each movement were excruciating, but he couldn't stop. There was something in him that refused to stop. Something in him that would do anything to protect.

He kept digging and every now and then did his best to get under Walter's arms to pull him free. It was slow work, but finally Walter was dragged from the dirty depths and collapsed on the ground, exhausted. Trembling hands pulled his shirt free, and Morgan lied down beside Walter who was gasping for air, legs still trapped in the dirt, but he didn't seem like he cared much.

Morgan released a breath he didn't know he had been holding and relaxed into the earth that was once more beneath him and no longer on top of him, the grip of sleep tugging at him.

Hands scooped him up from the ground, but he couldn't bring himself to care. They were gentle, safe. They held him close in the car ride back into the city and then a hand clasped his as he was led numbly through the city and back to their villa. It wasn't until they were entering their home that Morgan was finally able to put the hand in his as Hannibal's careful and guiding grip.

Morgan glanced back and over his shoulder to where Will was carrying Walter carefully, a streak of blood trailing through the dirt on Walter's shin, the bandage around his knee dark with it.

Morgan was ushered through the house and to the bathroom where Hannibal turned on the shower, causing Morgan to flinch slightly. Hannibal ran a hand over Morgan's head kindly. He knelt and took Morgan's arms in his strong grip, eyes flickering over Morgan's body.

"How are you feeling?" he asked softly. Morgan's lips pursed and he gave a small shrug in answer. "You're breathing alright?"

"Yes," Morgan replied with a nod. "My ribs hurt a bit, but I'm ok."

Hannibal's eyes once more dropped down Morgan's body, calculating and checking over Morgan carefully. "You're not bruising. I don't think you broke anything."

"Just more achy than anything else."

"Shower, *kleiner hase*. I'll have dinner ready for you when you are finished," Hannibal instructed before leaving the bathroom. Hannibal made his way back out and into the kitchen where Walter was once more sat in that kitchen chair. Will was on his knees, carefully removing the bandaging from Walter's knee, leaving the teen boy inhaling sharply through his teeth. Hannibal stopped beside Walter, a hand taking the boy's shoulder and Walter jumped, looking up at Hannibal with dirty cheeks and nose, the dirt so thick it hid his freckles. "You did very well, *Mangustėli*," he whispered, pressing a kiss to Walter's dirty hair. "We're going to get you cleaned up and get you to the hospital."

"Hospital?" Walter asked curiously, unsure if they had ever once been taken to the hospital before other than his broken leg. Hannibal had always fixed anything that could have possibly been wrong with them, though he always offered it as an option if the boys wanted it.

"I want some imaging done on your knee," Hannibal answered, hand caressing Walter's bare shoulder. "Would you like your dad or I to help you get cleaned up?"

"Dad."

Hannibal nodded and looked over Will who was gently dabbing gauze over Walter's torn stitching. Will rose to his feet and threw the gauze away before turning back to Walter, helping the boy from the chair.

"Are you having any issues breathing? Any pain in your chest, lungs, or ribs?" Hannibal questioned as he went to work on dinner. Something easy and light. Some fish would be best, and Will had recently caught some lovely cod the day before.

"No Sir," Walter replied softly as he was carefully led towards the stairs by Will.

"Is there anything else besides your knee that we need to take a look at?" Hannibal tried again.

“No Sir,” Walter repeated.

“Hurry down and we’ll go get you looked at.”

Will gave a small breath through his nose, the air hot with a frown. He said nothing as he helped Walter up the stairs and past the boy’s bathroom and into their master. He sat Walter on the edge of the tub and busied himself with turning on the shower.

“I’m happy you two are alright,” Will said, trying to break up the silence. As odd as it felt or sounded, he wasn’t entirely sure he knew how to speak to his children anymore. Both were pulling so harshly in two different directions that Will wasn’t clear on which he should follow or if he should stay in place and let them come back to him. Walter didn’t reply, just stared at the floor. Will stepped closer and his hand took Walter’s chin, pulling the boy to look up at him. “Are you alright?”

“Fine,” the boy grumbled with a small shrug. “I just got buried alive. Who wouldn’t be fine after that?”

Will frowned at the bitterness in Walter’s tone and he gave another small sigh. “You understand why we-”

“I understand,” Walter cut in with a nod. “Of course, I understand. That doesn’t mean I have to fucking like it.”

“Language,” Will corrected lightly, helping Walter back to his feet. Walter rolled his eyes, jaw tight. “I hate when he does this to you.” Walter’s person seemed to lighten up at that and Will could easily pick up the confusion from Walter’s skin. “You know that I don’t like the extremes. Don’t act surprised.”

Walter couldn’t help it though. He didn’t think that he would ever hear those words from his dad. He didn’t think he would hear the admittance that something Hannibal did was disliked. Hannibal wasn’t perfect? Well, of course Walter knew that, but he had figured that his dad had long ago gone blind to the imperfections that made up Hannibal Lecter.

“Can you do it yourself or do you need help?” Will asked when Walter didn’t say anything.

“I can shower myself.”

“Kay.” Will nodded and turned from the room, heading back to the kitchen where he could smell something being made, though his stomach was in far too many knots for him to be truly hungry. “Please don’t make them do that again.”

Hannibal didn’t even turn at the statement. He simply kept his back to Will, focus held on the stovetop. “They were successful. I don’t see a reason to return to such a situation. They’re smart boys,” Hannibal assured, grabbing a bottle of white wine, and pouring some into the pan he was using. “Could you get some basil, love?”

Will obeyed with a nod that he knew Hannibal couldn’t see. He stepped over to the window seal where the plant sat happy and green, picked a decent number of leaves from it, rinsing them in the sink before placing them on a cutting board beside Hannibal.

“I have something I need to discuss with you,” Hannibal announced. “Before the boys return.”

“And what would that be about?” Will asked, leaning against the counter, and watching his husband begin to chiffonade the basil.

“I have a feeling that I will be leaving town coming up here in a week or so.”

Will’s brows furrowed and he folded his arms over his chest catching Hannibal’s blank eyes. It wasn’t often that Hannibal hid things from Will anymore, but Will knew that whatever it was must have been weighing heavily on the man if he didn’t want to give Will any hint towards what was possibly happening.

And even if Will hadn’t had to exercise his empathy to the extent that he used to, that didn’t mean that he was rusty. He had been debating teaching the boys how to use it to their advantage if there was such a way to explain the empathy disorder to them in a better way than he had previously.

Will took Hannibal’s cheek in his hand and Hannibal paused in his knife work and met Will’s gaze. Will studied Hannibal carefully for a moment, eyes flickering over the man’s face to take in every inch of it and what it could possibly be holding in it.

A tick in Hannibal’s brow from worry or stress. A slight frown in his lips. Crinkles at the corners of his eyes from long hours spent in thought over the issue at hand. A tiredness from the bags under his eyes and Will wondered if Hannibal hadn’t been sleeping well. He hadn’t noticed and he felt guilty at the fact that he had been sleeping fine while Hannibal struggled with this internal puzzle he was trying to solve alone.

“It’s about that girl, isn’t it?” Will finally asked, the only issue he could truly come up with that would keep Hannibal up at night. Walter had long since ceased being such an issue for Hannibal. “The one back in Germany.”

“Yes.” Hannibal pulled himself free and went back to the cod he was cooking, adding in the basil and some tomatoes he had already cut up with a splash of more white wine. “I promised I would be there for a medical procedure if she so wished to have it done. I haven’t received any information on it, but I-”

“Alright,” Will agreed easily with a small nod, stepping up behind Hannibal and hugging the man from behind. He nuzzled his nose between Hannibal’s shoulder blades. “But once she’s healthy, please let it go. We can’t still be attached to our life there. If they find out that we’re here we’d have to leave again, and I don’t think the boys could handle another uprooting quite so soon.”

Hannibal pulled the food from the stove and set it aside on a cool burner before turning to face Will. He tipped Will’s head up and pressed a kiss to Will’s lips. “Not a moment longer than needed,” he agreed with a nod.

“You better come home to me, Hannibal. I’m far too tangled with you to live with you gone.” He pushed in closer until Hannibal kissed him once more. He moaned against the touch and let his eyes slip closed. “Can you sleep tonight? I hate the thought of you not resting.”

“As soon as the boys are safe in their beds.” Hannibal gave Will’s forehead a kiss before turning back to the food. “Will you go check on them?”

“Sure.” Will went for the stairs but stopped with his hand on the banister. “Did you want to take Walter to the hospital or should I?”

“He’s more than welcome to choose.”

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Walter limped into the house with a huff and Will looked up from the lure he was busy tying with what looked like some bright yellow feathers. He sat upright in his chair taking in the boy who had a brace over his knee, and who looked utterly annoyed as he went for the stairs.

“Walt-”

“Night,” Walter grumbled out under his breath as he awkwardly stumbled up the first few steps, his knee unable to bend from the brace he had on.

“Sleep well?” Will called after him, unsure of what else to say before he turned his attention to a tired looking Hannibal who was rubbing his eyes with one hand and closing the door with the other. “Is he ok?”

“Sprained knee. He’s just upset he has to wear a brace,” Hannibal answered, the door clicking as he locked it. He turned back around with a worn smile and stepped over to the desk Will was at, reaching out to run his hand through Will’s curls. Will’s eyes slid shut as he leaned into the gentle touch. “He continually complained that it was like when he broke his leg.”

“How long does he need to wear the brace?”

“A week or two depending on pain levels. He needs to ice it several times a day as well.”

“Should we go to bed?” Will tried to get up, but Hannibal’s hand slipped down to his shoulder and stopped him.

“I don’t want to interrupt your work, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal whispered, leaning down to grace Will’s curls with a kiss. “Please continue.” Before Will could say a word, Hannibal stepped away and directed his attention to the bar. “Whisky?”

Will snorted out some laughter and shook his head, turning back to the lure and reaching out for something orange instead of yellow. He put the orange in place as a boone duster and began to slowly tie it off. “Walter complained that much, huh?”

“He is your son, Will.”

“Our son,” Will corrected in a loving tone, accepting the glass of whiskey that was set beside him.

“Our son,” Hannibal agreed before taking a long sip of the caramel liquid.

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The brace was ripped from his leg and Water threw it to the floor in anger, the metal clanking as it hit the ground. His hands ran through his hair, and he groaned, throwing his head back in frustration. A small sob left him as his hand grazed over his nose that was still healing and a pain shot through his cheeks.

Why did everything happen to him? Why was it always him? Morgan was never hurt like this. Morgan had never had to have a bone realigned or wear a cast. He had a wrist brace once but that was the only real injury that Walter could recall Morgan having ever received and it was because

Morgan had tripped in the yard, not because Hannibal had chased him down across the city and then buried him alive. Why did it always have to be him?

Walter lay in his bed for a long while, staring up at the ceiling, unsure if he had actually fallen asleep or not until he sat bolt upright in a cold sweat, his shirt clinging to his body and his knee pounding out in pain.

He gasped, his hands desperately pulling the shirt from his body and tossing it to the floor. The summer air that had come in from the open window only made Walter's body feel sticky and he let out a small sob, trying to push away the pictures of dirt falling on top of him as the sound of nails being pounded into wood creaked through his ears.

He wiped the back of his hand over his nose and sniffled a bit before his fingers found the dampness of tears across his cheeks. Walter let out a pathetic sobbing laugh and shook his head. The nightmares never went away. Just when he thought they were finally beginning to dissipate something new and horrible came into being and sent Walter right back over the edge. He cursed that he knew what would help him. Cursed that he had become so dependent on the kid.

Walter pushed himself from the bed and stifled a pained noise as he put pressure on his pulsing knee. He limped from the room and across the hall to a closed door. Under the door a soft glow of light poured out and when Walter pushed the door open the small boy jumped in his bed, startled.

The book slammed shut before Morgan let out a sigh of relief. His eyes flicked over Walter curiously. "Bad dream?" Walter could only nod, closing the door behind him. "How's your knee?"

"Fucking hurts," Walter grumbled as he limped his way over to the kid. Morgan set the book on the bedside table and scooted over in his bed, creating enough room for Walter to join him. Walter carefully lowered himself beside Morgan and turned off the light. "Come here."

Morgan shuffled closer, doing his best to be mindful of Walter's knee and was scooped up by the older boy and hugged. Walter's face hid in Morgan's hair, and he hated how the smell of strawberries from Morgan's shampoo sent a fuzziness to his mind that relaxed him.

"Did you want to talk about it?" Morgan asked carefully, more feeling Walter shake his head than anything else.

"You weren't asleep," Walter whispered, eyes shut tightly.

"I wasn't."

"But you didn't come to my room."

"You said we needed to start sleeping alone," Morgan reminded and Walter fell still, even his breathing halted for several beats of the clock on the bedside table before he exhaled. What an idiot he had been. Of course, they needed to, but it was obvious that Morgan hadn't been able to sleep without him and Walter only ever had nightmares if he were alone. "Didn't you?"

"Tomorrow," Walter begrudgingly grumbled, though he knew it was a lie the moment the word left his lips.

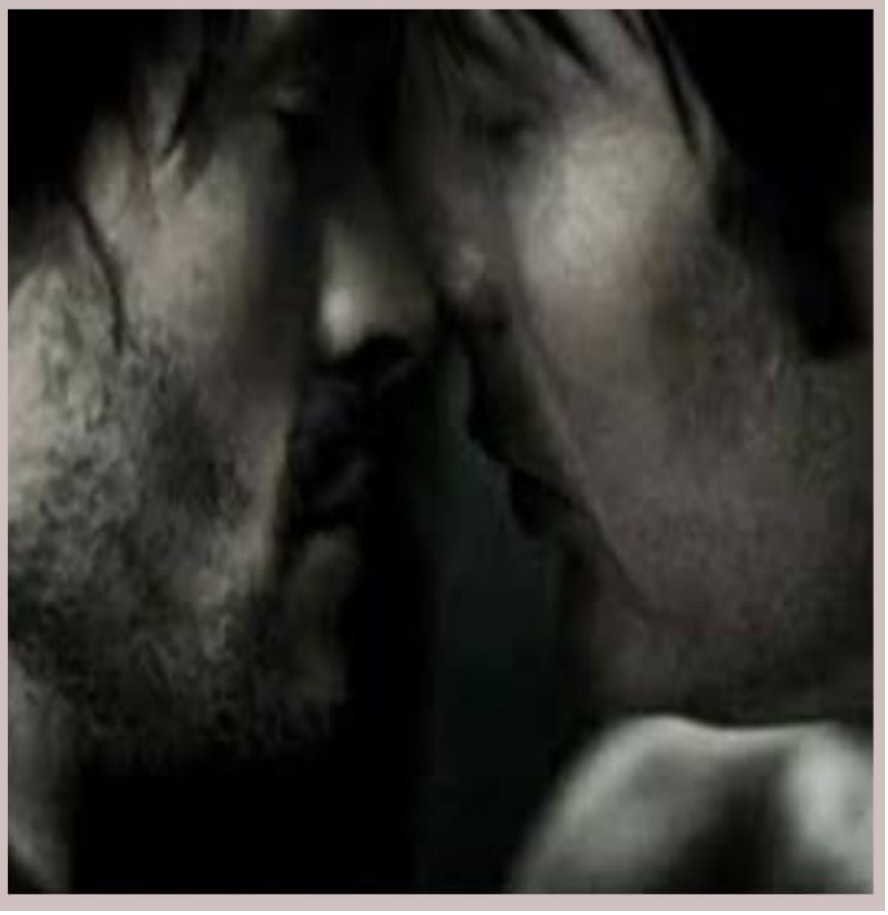
# Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

"You're not silencing your mind," Will said, causing Walter to blink from his train of thought. "You need to silence your own head, or you'll never be able to reach out to another person."

"This is ridiculous," Walter grumbled, folding his arms over his chest. He had once upon a time been impressed with Will's abilities, but it had grown far more irritating. The man always seemed to know everything and anything, even if he had been absent.

# The Silence Of The Lecters



Walter grumbled at the cold of the ice over his knee, complete and utter boredom over taking him. Morgan was fast asleep, knocked out most likely for the rest of the day from some cocktail of drugs Hannibal had cooked up for the boy. Hannibal had gone out for the afternoon going wherever the hell a Hannibal Lecter would go and that had left Walter in the living room with a silent Will who was busy at his desk with a lure.

“Your thoughts are loud today, Wally,” Will muttered though his voice was far more distracted than present.

“How could you possibly know what I’m thinking?” Walter hissed out through his teeth, the same frustration in his tone that had been there since the night before. “I know you have some weird superpower where you can see things that have happened, but you can’t read minds. I’m not stupid.”

“Superpower?”

“That’s what Hannibal calls it.” Will stopped his work and turned to look at Walter who met his gaze before correcting himself. “Father.” Walter huffed out in annoyance and dropped back onto the couch. “Why can’t we have a TV? I’m so damn bored!”

“Would you like me to teach you something?” Will questioned, getting from his desk, and pushing in his chair.

“If it’s how to make a lure, not really,” Walter grumbled, pushing the palms of his hands into his eyes until there were swirling shapes. He could make out Will’s nearly silent footsteps over to the couch and then felt the couch near his head dip down as Will took a seat. Fingers began to brush lovingly through his hair and Walter moved his hands away from his eyes so he could look up at a thoughtful Will. “What?”

“You asked me to teach you how to do this a few years ago. Are you still interested?”

Walter’s brows knitted together in confusion as he racked his head for what Will could possibly be speaking about. Walter felt like he always got whatever he possibly asked for, which was also just as infuriating as being told no, but for the life of him he couldn’t exactly pinpoint what Will was referring to.

“Think of another life,” Will supplied in a whisper, fingers still brushing through Walter’s hair. “At a dinner at a fancy new restaurant.” A small smile pulled at Will’s lips as realization bloomed over his son’s face. It was always so satisfying when his children found the answers on their own. Their eyes lit up and a smile would pull at their lips and there was nothing Will loved more than his children’s happiness. “Do you remember?”

“You said it was something that you couldn’t teach me.”

“I still don’t know if I can teach you. It’s a disorder.”

“No, it’s not,” Walter shot back, nose scrunched up in dislike and he shook his head, tipping his head back a bit more to look over Will. “Father thinks it’s special so it must be.”

Will laughed brightly and shook his head. “Stop liking your father so much. It’s unnatural.”

“I’m going to tell him you said that.” Walter sat up, pulling the ice from his knee so that he could lower his feet to the floor to be face to face with Will. “Ok, how do you read minds? Teach me.”

Will chuckled with a shake of his head. “It’s not reading minds. It’s more...” Will trailed off for a moment, eyes looking up and to the right in thought. “You have to think of it as literally walking a mile in another person’s shoes.”

Walter rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah. Be the other person.”

Will shook his head with a gentle smile. “You have no idea.”

Walter stopped and tipped his head to the side, shifting on the couch to turn to face Will a bit more. “You become the other person?”

“You don’t so much as read minds as you take in the information around you and read their emotions,” Will further explained. “You have to observe. You have to find the smallest details in the room and understand them, use them to build the picture of the person in your mind and then embody it. You have to understand and share the feelings of another person.”

“Simple enough.” Walter shrugged but paused his smugness when he saw Will’s gentle smile. The same smile that Will always used when one of them didn’t understand something the way that they needed to. Something that told him that he was close but wasn’t quite grasping what was being put in front of him. “What?”

“You’re too headstrong.” Will tapped Walter’s forehead and Walter swatted at the man’s head. “You’re too proud and I blame Hannibal for that.” Will pushed himself up from the couch and Walter had to turn with an arm over the back to watch as his dad went for the kitchen.

“But Hannibal can do it too, can’t he?”

“No.”

Will opened the little wine fridge and dug through it for a moment before turning around with a plate that Walter knew all too well. A plate with the last brownie from a dessert several nights ago that he hid for himself for when he could sneak downstairs during the night and eat it. With his knee, there was no sneaking, so there it had sat, teasing him. His secret place in the fridge where he always shoved everything he wanted to hide. Behind the wine. Hannibal might have drunk a lot of wine, but it was always full. Once one bottle was pulled, another was put in place, so Walter thought that his hiding spot was flawless. Obviously not to Will.

Soon Will was sitting next to Walter with the plate in hand. “You’re going to hate me for this, but it’s important,” Will explained, pulling back the cloth over the top of the plate.

“How long have you known?” Walter asked in a grumble.

“You need to stop stepping in the middle of the stairs. They make noise at night. Use the outside of the stairs. They will support your weight better,” Will explained as he put the brownie to his lips and took a bite out of it, watching Walter frown. “What’s wrong?” Will asked innocently through his mouthful.

“You know that was mine,” Walter grumbled.

“And you know that Hannibal will make you brownies any time you ask. There’s no need to hoard food anymore Wally,” Will said before taking another bite.

Walter rolled his eyes. “What are you trying to teach me by eating my brownie?”

“How are you feeling?”

Walter snickered and shook his head, jaw tight. “More pissed off than I was.”

“Good,” Will said through the last bite. He set the plate aside and leaned back against the arm of the couch to regard Walter. “Stop being pissed off.”

“How the hell am I-”

“Focus,” Will instructed, tipping his head to the side, curious if Walter could grasp the concept or not. Walter could mask his feelings if he wanted to, but not feeling them was something else altogether. “Stop whatever else you are doing, end your internal dialogue on other thoughts, and free your mind to give the speaker your attention.”

“The speaker?” Walter questioned. “I’m more annoyed by how you ate my-”

“I’m the speaker. How am I feeling?”

“How could I possibly-”

“You need to let your anger go,” Will said with a laugh, causing Walter to pout, but fall silent. “I know you’re upset about your knee and that I just ate your brownie. I know that yesterday wasn’t how you wanted to spend your time, but you need to set all of that aside.”

“And what am I looking for if I set those aside?”

“That depends on what you want to find.”

*What I want to find,* Walter repeated in his head as he looked over his dad. The brownie thing he could set aside, even if it really had annoyed him. Will had been right, he could just as Hannibal to make some more and Hannibal would be more than happy to accomplish said task. What Walter was having issues pushing aside was how everything continued to happen to him. How unfair the world felt. How he was shoved out into the open to take the brunt of any attack while Morgan was held back and coddled.

He couldn’t blame Morgan. It was just the nature of the beast. Morgan was younger and just came from a smaller build than Walter. Morgan might as well have been a girl with how absolutely glass-like he physically was. Morgan was sensitive and innocent in ways that Walter had to stop being and maybe Will and Hannibal wanted to preserve that for as long as they could, but it wasn’t fair. None of it was and that was worse than having to wear a knee brace for a week.

“You’re not silencing your mind,” Will said, causing Walter to blink from his train of thought. “You need to silence your own head, or you’ll never be able to reach out to another person.”

“This is ridiculous,” Walter grumbled, folding his arms over his chest. He had once upon a time been impressed with Will’s abilities, but it had grown far more irritating. The man always seemed to know everything and anything, even if he had been absent.

“Close your eyes and focus on your breathing exercises. When you’re ready with what you are wanting to find, reach out to me,” Will explained, reaching out a hand and cupping Walter’s cheek softly. His thumb brushed over Walter’s freckled skin, and he gave an encouraging smile. “Close your eyes, come on.”

Walter rolled his eyes once more but obeyed with a huff. He settled into his own body, focusing on steadying his breathing into the 4-7-8 rhythm that Hannibal had taught him. It took about four rounds before Walter’s body relaxed, stress slowly melting away, frustration falling and anger, while not fully abandoned, softening.

*What do I want to know?* Walter asked himself again, now fully able to focus on this question. There had to be something for him to reach out for, to look for. *What is Dad feeling? What do I want to know and how is Dad feeling?*

Walter wasn’t exactly sure how to meld the two ideas together. It was such an odd thing to try to fit them into a singular purpose and it took a minute longer before Walter finally found the right question to be asking instead of the two separate ones.

*How do I feel Dad’s feelings to the point of learning something?*

*You need to stop stepping in the middle of the stairs. They make noise at night. Use the outside of the stairs. They will support your weight better.*

How did he know that? How did Will know that stairs made less noise when you stepped on the outside of them? Walter supposed it was just basic logic if one took the time to truly think about it, but it sounded like Will had spoken from experience. So, what experience?

Will watched Walter’s face carefully, curious as to what the boy was going to pick from. His mind had long since silenced, but his brows were furrowed up in confusion. His nose twitched in dislike at something and then his breathing picked up.

Will couldn’t be sure what Walter was seeing, if Walter were seeing anything at all. Will could always see the scenes remade and played out with him as the main character. A first-person video game he couldn’t control and just had to wait for the cut scene to finish before he could snap back into the real world.

He was curious if Walter would see anything or if he would be more like Hannibal and just come to logical conclusions, explanations, and answers. Hannibal could pick up on things as quickly as Will could. That was one of the many reasons that he loved Hannibal. The man could keep up with him on a mental level when others couldn’t. But Hannibal didn’t use empathy to get where he was going. Hannibal didn’t feel what others were feeling and Hannibal didn’t necessarily care what others were feeling. It helped him stay distant and practical while it drove Will to act with abandon when his emotions ran too high.

A tear slipped down Walter’s cheek and Will watched as brown eyes slowly flickered open with damp lashes. Walter looked away from Will and pulled from Will’s hand with a sharp inhale. His hand reached up and brushed the tears away from his cheeks.

“I didn’t know,” Walter whispered, nose only scrunching up further. His voice was thick as he held back more tears. “I’m sorry.”

“What did you find?” Will asked carefully, finding Walter’s chin and pulling the boy to look at him once more.

“Does it always feel like you’re intruding on someone’s personal information?” Walter didn’t dare meet Will’s gaze, but his hand took Will’s wrist, fingers gently gliding over Will’s pulse point, almost as if Walter were checking it. “I feel like I shouldn’t be allowed to know that about you, like I stole something from you.”

“What did you find?”

“You’re like me,” Walter answered, a sad sort of smile playing at his lips as he pushed Will’s hand away. He reached out for his brace and slipped his foot into it before placing it at his knee. Velcro ripped loudly through the room. “Or you grew up like I did. You didn’t know when your next meal would be and so you had to sneak food.” Will watched as Walter pushed himself up from the couch and scooped up the bag of ice to return it to the freezer for later use. “That’s how you knew to use the edges of the stairs.”

Walter began his limped hobble to the fridge to put away the pack and Will could only stare after him. Once the pack was in the freezer, Walter made his way to the stairs to start up them but turned back at his name.

“Feeling like you’re intruding on private information doesn’t go away,” Will replied. “But it does get easier to deal with.”

Walter gave a nod. “I’ll keep practicing. There’s no way I’ll ever be as good as you, though.” He turned back to the stairs and left Will alone in the living room, curious as to what Walter had possibly put together about him.

Will cleaned up the plate, checked on the still sleeping Morgan and then returned to his desk, finishing off the lure just as the front door was unlocked and Hannibal swept in, bringing the warm Italian heat with him. Will smiled and got to his feet, moving over to whisk a bag of groceries from Hannibal’s grip and give the man a kiss.

“How was the market?” Will asked, setting the paper bag aside on the counter to begin to dig through it to put items away in their respective places.

“Lovely as always,” Hannibal replied, adding the second bag to the counter, and following Will suit, each rummaging around the kitchen in a well-rehearsed dance. “You should come with me next time. You would enjoy the selection of fresh fish.”

“I can just catch them myself,” Will pointed out with a laugh. “The sailboat is good for one thing.”

“Not an annoying hindrance?” Hannibal’s brows rose in challenge and Will stopped with a hand on a cabinet door, meeting Hannibal’s gaze with a cheeky smile. “I seem to recall that-”

“Yes, yes,” Will quickly cut in, closing the door loudly before hopping up onto the counter. “So, sue me for changing my opinion.” He snatched out a peach from the bag and bit into it, the juices running down his chin and over his hand and wrist. Will wiped at his chin but his arm was snatched up and a tongue trailed delicately over his wrist, causing a shiver to race up his spine. “Hannibal,” he whispered, eyes sliding closed as teeth danced over the dip in his palm. “Haven’t been dreaming of eating me again, have you?”

There was a thoughtful hum from Hannibal and Will's wrist was released, though Hannibal's touch didn't go far. Instead, it found the hem of Will's button up shirt and slipped underneath it, tracing some new scarring over Will's abdomen, right above his hip. Will's body trembled at the gentleness and his head tipped back enough to allow Hannibal's mouth to find his throat. A tantalizing kiss was placed there while the fingers continued to dance over the scar.

"I'm quite sated at the moment and you've recovered beautifully. Let's not rush things. We have time to enjoy ourselves. Plenty of anniversaries yet to come." There was a tease to Hannibal's tone, but Will was far too lost in the touches and the way Hannibal's warm breath caressed over his neck to find a way to snap back at the man. "Though you are far more divine than I could have thought possible, Mr. Lecter." Another kiss was pressed to Will's neck before a light nip and then Hannibal stepped back, leaving Will in a daze. "Finish your peach dear. Don't let it go to waste."

Will let out a breath that had been trapped somewhere in his chest and let his eyes flicker open. He stared blankly over his husband as Hannibal finished putting away the rest of the groceries before he finally was able to come back to himself enough to take another bite of his peach.

"I tried to teach Walter empathy today," he announced, calling maroon eyes to him. Hannibal's eyes trailed over Will calculatedly before he fetched a paring knife from the knife block and an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter.

"And how did that go?" The knife sliced into the apple easily and Hannibal brought the slice still held to the knife blade to his mouth. It crunched through the small kitchen and Hannibal leaned against the counter, getting comfortable for the train wreck he was sure was going to come.

Will shrugged around another bite of peach. "Not sure. I'm not sure if he just guessed or if he understood."

"What did he say?"

Will's brows furrowed and he blinked as his head tipped to the side. "I was trying to get him to read something about me. He cried a little and said that we grew up the same. Mentioned something about having enough to eat and then went to his room."

Hannibal bit into another slice of apple in quiet thought. "He wasn't wrong."

"I know." Will lowered himself from the counter and tossed the peach pit into the garbage before moving to the sink to wash the stickiness from his hands. "I just wish I knew how he reached the conclusion. I don't know if what I was teaching made any sense or if-"

"Empathy can be taught," Hannibal interrupted gently. "Your gift cannot be simply passed on. Despite how hard I might try, I could never recreate the same details that you are able to."

"You? Empathize?" Will snorted out his laughter as he turned off the sink. "It's hard enough to get you to sympathize, let alone empathize."

"Don't test me while I have a knife in my hand, Will," Hannibal warned, though there was a brightness to his eyes. Will laughed again and shook his head. He stepped closer to Hannibal, invading the man's space to the point where Hannibal had to move his arms to allow Will to rest against his chest. Will nuzzled there, hugging around Hannibal's middle. "Have you checked on Morgan lately?"

“Just before you came home. Still out.”

“I would expect so. He’ll build up a tolerance soon enough.” Will’s curls received a kiss from Hannibal and Will just snuggled in closer to his husband’s body. “Yours still needs some work as well.”

“You don’t want me to gain a tolerance,” Will pointed out. “We wouldn’t be able to have as much fun if you couldn’t drug me every now and then, right?” Will kissed over Hannibal’s heart and leaned back to kiss Hannibal’s lips that tasted faintly of apples. “Are we still going out tomorrow?”

“I have everything set up with Signora Pia. The boys will be there tomorrow morning.”

“And if we are being followed, what then?” Will shifted uncomfortably against Hannibal’s chest and Hannibal sighed, setting the knife and apple aside to hug Will to his chest. Hannibal rested his cheek against Will’s head and inhaled deeply.

“Then we take them out and we move again,” Hannibal answered softly with just a hint of regret in his voice. “We knew that people would be after us. We knew from the beginning that we wouldn’t just be allowed to live.”

“Is it childish of me to hope that someday that might still happen?” Will nuzzled himself further against Hannibal, inhaling deeply of the warm summer heat of the outside world and the rainy forest that made up Hannibal’s scent. “Is it pathetic that I still pray that Jack will give up? That our old life will just die? That it had just died when we left Verger Manner the last time?”

“Your hope is dazzling, Will,” Hannibal assured. “There is nothing wrong with wanting something.” Fingers brushed through Will’s curls kindly and Hannibal nuzzled his nose into the cinnamon tinted hair. “Never lose it.”

“I just wish we could live somewhere for more than a year before having to pack up and leave again.” Will pulled himself free from Hannibal’s grip and took a step back, running his fingers through his curls. “Wouldn’t it be nice to just be able to stay in one place for a bit? Get something a bit more stable?”

Hannibal took back up his knife and apple and cut off another slice, bringing it to his lips. “Of course it would be nice, Will.”

“But unrealistic.” Will gave a deep sigh and turned away from Hannibal, hands taking the island so he could lean against it. He could make out the crunch of the apple behind him and then a slow step towards him. Will rolled his eyes with a smile and glanced back over his shoulder. “I know, I know,” he grumbled with a small laugh.

Hannibal’s brow ticked up curiously in question as he ate another slice of apple. “I didn’t say a thing, my love.”

“You don’t have to,” Will explained, giving a shrug of his shoulders. “I love you Will. Your head is in the clouds again, Will. Think about the safety of the children, Will.” Will turned back around and was greeted with some of the apple held out on the blade of the knife towards him. He took it and placed it in his mouth, closing his eyes to enjoy the simpleness of the fruit. Something that Hannibal had been trying to teach him to do. To enjoy every small little thing because even the small things were wonderful and needed to be treated just as the big things in life were. “I’m sorry I keep bringing up this conversation. I should be past it.”

“The fact that you keep bringing it up and think you should be past it means that you’re not ready to explore the meaning behind it and there is something you need to continue to work out. When you are ready to let it go, your mind will have finished processing it and will let it go.”

“You never stop being a psychiatrist, do you?” Will teased.

Hannibal went to work throwing the core of the apple away and went to the sink to wash the knife. “Do you ever stop being a profiler?”

Will snorted and folded his arms over his chest. “I haven’t been a profiler in years, Hannibal.”

“But yesterday at the market you saw something,” Hannibal pointed out as he placed the knife in the drying rack. He reached out for the hand towel next to the sink to dry his hands. “You always see something even if it’s an old man picking up a card for an anniversary for his wife who passed away. You don’t stop.” Fingers dug into his sides and Hannibal jumped, heart picking up a tick despite the fact that he didn’t want it to. He turned back to Will who was smiling widely like a fool and couldn’t help the dark tip of his own lips. “Will, I thought we discussed-”

“It’s not my fault that you’re ticklish,” Will shot back with a snort. “It fits you in an odd sort of way, you know.”

“How?” Hannibal grumbled, tossing the towel at Will who caught it. Will stepped over to the sink with a shrug and folded the damp towel up to put it back in its place.

“Something so monstrous and strong as you would have a weakness as silly as being ticklish.” Will said it lightly, simply, as if there were nothing more to it.

“You and those children are my weakness, Will. Not some panic response to being touched.”

“Awe,” Will taunted with a smirk, turning back to Hannibal, and snatching up the man’s loose tie, pulling on it to bend Hannibal down to Will’s height. “Don’t be so loud. Someone might notice that you care.” Will pressed a kiss to Hannibal’s lips swiftly but didn’t release his grip on the tie. He just held to the fabric to keep Hannibal in mild submission.

“I do care,” Hannibal muttered out in a voice that sounded nearly like confusion to Will as if Will had never before considered the idea of Hannibal actually caring. But Will knew better. He knew that everything Hannibal did was out of care for the three of them. Even the infuriatingly maddening things were done with the idea of utmost care possible. With a kind smile, Will leaned forward and gave another kiss to Hannibal letting this one linger a little longer before his free hand reached out and once more found Hannibal’s side, digging into it. Hannibal jumped back with a sharp inhale and narrowed eyes. “Will,” he hissed.

A smile split over Will’s lips, and he dropped the cannibal’s tie, racing around the island and through the house with the killer’s hurried footsteps close behind him. Will rounded the piano in the music room, but before he could make it to the study and the safety of a locked door, an arm snatched up his waist and he was pulled to the floor and pinned to the hardwood with a stronger body over the top of his, his laughter broken up with kisses.

“Incorrigible little boy,” Hannibal muttered between kisses, hands making sure to have a firm grip on Will’s wrists so that he couldn’t reach out and touch again.

Walter wasn't entirely sure if he had imagined the images that came to his head when he was exploring his dad's own. He let his eyes slide closed as he listened boredly to Morgan's slow and steady breathing. His uninjured foot swung him back and forth in Morgan's desk chair as the conjured images came back to his mind's eye.

They were blurry at best, faded and muddled around the edges as if he were trying to grasp something that was on the cusp of passing out of existence. The voices and actions within said pictures were so muffled that Walter felt like he was straining to hear them, even though it was just his mind creating the scenes.

Walter had never seen pictures of Will as a child, but the idea of a skinny, scrawny, dirty boy with insane and untamed curls was put in place. The adult, Walter was pretty sure it was a father figure of some sort, was just a blob with a warped voice like the grownups in the Peanuts movies.

But that slap felt as real as the first time Walter had been hit by one of his mother's many questionable suitors. A curly haired child fell to the ground and was kicked, maybe with steel toed boots. It felt more correct than looked more correct and Walter had to wonder how much of this he had made up and how much was being pulled from reality.

He could see a young child climb from bed and step through rotting trailers and motel rooms, each and every step perfectly calculated. Each creak in the floor was memorized and mapped out in the child's mind. Walter had tried to sneak out a handful of times, but each was unsuccessful. Either there was absolutely nothing to eat or there was a drunk beating waiting for him and so he quickly ditched the ventures from his room and just allowed his stomach to growl angrily at him until he finally fell asleep because he couldn't be hungry if he was asleep.

One particular place had stairs and just as Will had explained, the young child version of Will made careful work of stepping on the very outside of the steps where there was better support and the floor less likely to bend and creak under his weight.

Walter had never seen himself as Will despite the way that everyone he met told him that he was. Even people who didn't know him could place him next to Will as if he were Will's biological son. It didn't really bother Walter, but it made him wonder if he were his own person or if everyone in similar circumstances growing up ended up in the same twisted way that he did.

Walter could fight it, had fought it tooth and nail for years. He was still fighting it, but he found it harder and harder to find reasons to argue as the days went on. That last night in Germany was enough of a wake up for him. He could chip his teeth, snap his nails, break every bone in his body trying to bulldoze against the force pulling him towards his life, but neither of his parents had lied to him.

Both had been perfectly transparent when they had explained why they were teaching Walter what they were teaching him. Why the guns and the knives and the wilderness survival training. Why the odds and ends that he was nearly positive he would never have to use were shoved down his throat. He wouldn't be alive now if they hadn't been.

Walter nearly snickered as the idea of parents came back to him on the summer breeze through the open window. How long had he denied Hannibal that title? How many years had Hannibal been Sir? And how easily Walter had been broken down, given in. A simple tumble into a hole and a broken leg had been more than enough of a bargaining chip in Hannibal's favor, though Hannibal had never pushed the agenda. It had just been there, waiting to be grabbed a hold of and oh how

Walter had snapped at it and used it as a lifeline. How fitting that word of Father seemed in that moment and most moments since then.

“Wally?” A grumbling pulled Walter from his thoughts and mindless swinging in the chair, and he opened his eyes to find a still rather out of it pair of blue eyes looking at him. “Feel sick.”

“I’ll get Father.”

# Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

It had earned the man who now lay dead in some far off alley way an extra kick. But the scene was clean. Just a snapped neck like agreed upon. Nothing too devastating.

# Silence Of The Lecters

With the boys dropped off with the sitter the next morning, Hannibal and Will went off on an easy stroll through town and the shops. The breeze off the canal always gave Will pause to appreciate the way it filled his lungs a bit more than being stuck more mainland did. Hannibal always allowed Will the silent moments of closed eyed bliss, happy to see the way that Will seemed to be slowly but surely relaxing more into himself as the months continued to pass by.

Will's eyes opened once more, and he couldn't stop the bright smile over his lips despite the fact that he knew this wasn't just a simple outing. "No children," he announced as they began once more through the morning shopping crowd. "No work. No school. What ever shall we do with our stolen time?"

"Defiant creature." Hannibal grinned with a shake of his head, letting his hand be snatched up by Will and his body drug past the small markets and further towards the center of Venice.

Piazza San Marco was a dazzling sight. There were plenty of cafes and plenty of people. Hundreds of tables and even hundreds more chairs. Sometimes vendors would set up stalls and sell wares and goods among the trickling tiered fountain. Tourists took pictures happily while older women fed pigeons. The Basilica stood tall and proud with its four golden horses and some winged lions looked nearly ready to jump to life to eat up the group of nuns that stood beneath it chatting happily. During the day the cobblestones belonged to the tourists and the pigeons, but at night it belonged to the horses and lions.

Will knew exactly why Hannibal had picked this particular spot. Everyone came to St. Mark's square at least once a day. It was a perfect place to people watch without looking out of place. A perfect place to sit and wait for a particular event to occur. One just needed to be patient and have a very sharp pair of eyes. Not to mention that there were only two bridges across the Grand Canal and that made it all the easier to trap someone just in place.

Will was gently guided into a *pasticceria* where the two of them were greeted with a lively, "*Buongiorno*." Will looked happily through the pastries while Hannibal went about buying a small box of cakes. Will was always amazed by the great care the bakers of Venice took over wrapping their cakes. They didn't just hand them over in plastic bags or foil prepackaged wrappers. Instead, they were always packed in a beautiful box and tied up with a ribbon.

Once a café was decided upon and Will took a seat in a cold, metal chair the ribbon was pulled, and the box opened so that Will could look inside to find two cream covered cakes with fresh fruit. A waiter came and Hannibal ordered them some espresso. Will sat back in his chair, taking a rather large bite of his cake that had Hannibal frowning, but Will didn't mind so much.

The espressos came and Hannibal stirred some sugar into the tiny cup, eyes far more trained out on the crowds than on his motions. A large crowd of people big enough to fill a *vaporetto* started to swarm into the square. He eyed them patiently, one by one. A couple of schoolchildren, an old man, three women with stuffed shopping bags, a group of nuns. But the two faces he was looking for were not among them.

"They could just live near us?" Will offered around another mouthful of cake, calling Hannibal's eyes to gaze at him incredulously over the rim of his sunglasses. It wasn't often that Will got to see Hannibal in such a relaxed state of dress, even at home, but he enjoyed it when it occurred. The softness of unstyled hair that had finally grown out longer again. A loose and flowing white button

up that wasn't starched or ironed, and pants that Will dared to call khakis, but Hannibal would go down fighting that they were anything but. "They could just be neighbors."

"You don't believe that," Hannibal pointed out softly, leaning over to kiss some missed cream away from Will's mouth, causing the younger man's cheeks to pinken slightly. He licked the sweetness from his lips before chasing it away with the bitterness of the espresso. "You know as well as I do that they followed us from Germany."

Will sighed and his shoulders slumped in quick defeat. "I know," he muttered, setting the last bit of his cake aside. "They would have had something in place if the others didn't come back, etcetera, blah, blah, blah." Hannibal had to hide his smile at the pout Will gave. "I would just like a single day where I didn't feel like I was looking over my shoulder, you know?"

Hannibal pursed his lips and shook his head. "Unfortunately, I don't, Will."

"Bullshit," Will laughed, turning his eyes to a group of Japanese tourists excitedly taking pictures of an angelic little boy with golden blond hair as if they had never seen such a thing before. Hannibal didn't seem too entirely interested in the photography and had returned his focus to the span of people by the lion fountain. "You thought you had everyone fooled. Everyone was dancing along to the tune of your fiddle. Don't even pretend that you-"

"I was not careless or stupid," Hannibal cut in, voice just as even as ever. "Just because I could comfortably hide myself didn't mean that I wasn't constantly *looking over my shoulder*. I just didn't expect to find you there."

"Stop flirting," Will teased, hand reaching out to take Hannibal's that rested on the tabletop and Hannibal twisted his hand so that he could hold Will's palm in his, thumb caressing the back of Will's hand in a steady rhythm. "I might start to think this is a date."

"It can be both, can't it?"

"A stakeout date?" Will entertained the idea for a moment longer than what was necessary all for the sake of sarcasm that he swore had Hannibal's eyes rolling behind the glasses on the bridge of the killer's nose. "I thought we agreed to keep work and pleasure separate."

"They have begun to blur," Hannibal admitted in a soft tone that Will nearly missed. "I'm not sure where one begins and one ends anymore."

"I'm not fucking you in a graveyard again after doing something jarring with a shovel."

"Hush," Hannibal instructed, sitting a little further up in his chair, hand pulling from Will's unconsciously as he zeroed in on who he was certain were the two men that had been hanging around their home the last few nights. One was a small and stocky man, eating a slice of pizza with some cheese stuck to his walrus-like mustache. The other was taller and on his nose sat a thick pair of glasses with plain lenses that made him look slightly dim-witted and completely harmless. A baseball cap and a big camera hanging in front of his chest. "Near the basilica."

Will's attention shifted to the cathedral, flickering over every face before his gaze finally rested on the same two men that Hannibal had found. Will snorted. "They tried to look like tourists?"

"It's not a bad disguise." Hannibal pulled a few bills from his pocket and tossed them on the table before getting to his feet. "It's been a while since we've been the ones being chased." Will got to

his feet too, coffee and cakes being forgotten as the two of them shuffled away from the table. Will knew all too well what they were waiting for. If they were followed then they had a problem. “Shall we be off?”

“I don’t see why not.”

Will passed around the table and let his waist be taken up by Hannibal as they started a long walk through the crowded square. “Does this remind you of something?” he asked with a happy note to his voice.

“Should it?” Will asked back, leaning into Hannibal so he didn’t hit someone passing by.

“*Hai dimenticato la nostra prima notte di nozze?” (Have you forgotten our wedding night?)*

“No.” Will rolled his eyes with a light smile. “It’s been two years. I’m ok.”

“There was that-”

“It only lasted for a few hours. I promise, I’m fine,” Will assured, turning in Hannibal’s grip to kiss the man. His hand cupped Hannibal’s face and his thumb caressed his impossibly sharp cheekbones. “You said so yourself that I hit the water head first. It’s only natural that something got jostled.” Will kissed Hannibal once more before turning his attention over Hannibal’s shoulder to spot the two men from earlier much closer than before though both looked like they were huddled around the camera to seem busy. Will let out a deep breath. “You were right. We’ll meet up at Barbarossa’s?”

“Don’t do anything rash.”

“Rash?” Will’s eyes returned to Hannibal’s face and he rolled his eyes at a smirk over Hannibal’s lips. “Because I’m the one who just-”

“We’re in public, Will,” Hannibal reminded, taking Will’s waist once more and guiding Will back through the crowds and towards the edge of the marketplace. “People don’t need to know about our private affairs.”

They reached the edge of the square and Will turned his head to press a kiss to Hannibal’s cheek, catching the two men even closer. “I love you,” Will whispered, being met with a warm smile.

“I love you too. Barbarossa’s. If one of us isn’t there in ten minutes, head back home.”

“Sweden?”

“Sweden,” Hannibal confirmed with a single nod.

“Right.”

Will stole one more glance over Hannibal’s shoulder and the moment he saw one of the men reaching into their jackets for whatever weapon they had brought, Will broke into a sprint in one direction and Hannibal in the other.

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“What do you think they’re doing?” Morgan asked over the top of the bowl he was stirring some flour, salt, water and honey with a wooden spoon. Walter watched in mild amusement as the sticky

dough that was forming began to trap the spoon, making it nearly impossible for him to move it.

“Who knows,” Walter grumbled out from where he sat on the other side of the counter carefully peeling oranges to candy them. But Walter knew. There had been men hanging around outside of the house that wouldn’t go away. He could see them on nights when he couldn’t sleep and would look out of his bedroom window to see the canals. He could put two and two together. Remnants of Germany clung to them and Will and Hannibal were severing them.

“Nonna Pia?” Morgan asked as the older woman who had become their go to babysitter came back to the kitchen island with some other ingredients for their pastry. “Isn’t this just a croissant?”

“*La sfogliatella è un croissant?*” *(The sfogliatella is a croissant?)* Nonna Pia demanded in a mock teasing tone, though Walter knew there was some truth behind her words. Once all of the items were placed on the counter, she let out a huff, her hands going to her waist as some brown hair dusting with grey hair fell into her face. “*La sfogliatella è un croissant?”* she repeated, causing Morgan to giggle and return to trying to stir the dough in the bowl. Walter smiled lightly, something nice about teasing in the kitchen instead of a seriousness of trying to make everything perfect. “*Prendi lucciole per lanterne!” (Get fireflies for lanterns!)* Walter let out a laugh at that. “No, *il mio bambino.* We are not making sad French pastries in this kitchen.”

“It’s a stuffed croissant,” Walter whispered across the counter to Morgan, making sure that his voice was loud enough for the signora to hear. Walter jumped with another laugh as a newspaper was snatched up from the counter and used to smack him lightly with.

“*Cosa dovrei fare con voi due?*” *(What am I supposed to do with you two?)* She gave a loud sigh with a roll of her eyes, though on her pale lips there was a kind smile. “Here I am, trying to be a good *nonna* and teach you something and you two are so ungrateful.”

“We don’t have grandparents,” Walter laughed out. There was another smack of the newspaper to his head.

*“Ingrato. Vado a prendere il mio cucchiaio, amore.” (Ungrateful. I'll go get my spoon, love.)*

“Oh no,” Walter snickered, the words sarcastic. “Not the wooden spoon.”

“What do we do now, Nonna Pia?” Morgan called out, pushing the bowl aside with dough that was nowhere near the right consistency and pulling Nonna Pia’s attention from Walter to the child.

“We are going to add more flour to that dough and then while it rests, we will make the *scorze d'arancia candite,” (candied orange peel)* Nonna Pia answered sweetly. “As soon as your brother finishes with those *arance*. *Il sole tramonterà presto se non ti sbrighi.” (oranges. The sun will be setting soon if you don't hurry.)*

“*Sì signora,*” Walter said with some new determination, reaching for the second of five oranges to begin peeling it. “What are we going to do with all the oranges?”

“We’re going to make a Sicilian orange cake that my *nonna* taught me to make when I was *una bambina.*”

“I can’t wait for Dad and Father to taste these!” Morgan said in excitement as he reached for the container of flour, pulling it closer to the bowl.

“Yeah.” Walter’s smile dropped slightly at the thought and he sighed as he reached out for another orange.

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Hannibal picked his route carefully. He had spent many hours staring at maps of Venice and many years wandering her maze of lanes and canals that made her so unique. He still didn’t know all of the city’s nooks and crannies, but then again no one did. He doubted that even a native Venetian would know all the secrets of the city. There were so many hiding places, and so many narrow alleys with names no one could remember. Some of them had no names at all. Boarded-up churches, deserted houses. The whole city was one huge invitation to play hide and-seek.

The alleys he stepped through became narrower and he tried not to smile at the thought that the walrus man had followed after him and possibly would get caught between the buildings that he could move through easily. It was quiet as he entered the hidden heart of the city where there were hardly any strangers.

Cats darted away as their footsteps rang out on the paving stones. Pigeons cooed from the rooftops. The ever present water swayed beneath the city, splashing against boats and wooden posts, reflecting back the old faces of the houses.

As Hannibal wandered deeper and deeper into the maze with the larger man huffing and puffing loudly behind him, the houses seemed to be moving in on them, watching them as if they knew who they were.

The faint memory of a Parisian night came to the forefront of Hannibal’s mind where he chased a man down similar mazes and carved his sister’s name into a man. He wouldn’t do that here, but he was certain that whatever happened would be just as staining to his hands.

He turned a sharp corner that was a dead end just as he knew it would be and stopped. He turned back around, listening for the man barreling after him. It took longer than Hannibal thought it would and he found himself being grateful for the workout routine that he and Will had been taking part in with the children because he didn’t even need to catch his breath like the portly man did as he finally came into view, sputtering and gasping for air.

“*Sie arbeiten für den Mann, den ich tot gelassen habe, nicht wahr?” (You work for the man I left dead, don't you?)* Hannibal asked, stepping closer to the man who had bent over his knees in an attempt to stabilize himself from the run.

The man glanced up with a huff and nodded, slowly straightening himself. “We are here to settle the issues. Your children for him.”

Hannibal felt a deep frown pull at his lips and he stepped closer, towering over the man who took a step back at the sudden approach. “You honestly think I would let you touch my children?”

“*Die alte Dame ist nicht so erschreckend.*” *(The old lady is not so frightening.)*

“It’s not the old lady that I would be worrying about,” Hannibal informed with a huff of impatient air. “My children are more than capable of holding their own. What doesn’t fall in your favor is the fact that I already know that only two of you were sent.”

There was a hint of surprise on the man’s face at the realization that Hannibal had known all along. That he was the hunted and the prey, when the entire time he had thought it was the other way

around.

“I will also be making sure that no others will be coming after us as well,” Hannibal continued, seeing the man’s face pale as further comprehension came to him.

“*Wie?*” *(How?)*

“I’m afraid that that’s not something you need to be worried about. My telling you will not change your fate.” Hannibal glanced down at his watch. His ten minutes were nearly up. He couldn’t keep playing with his food. With an easy and fluid motion Hannibal reached out and took the man’s head, twisting it at a sickening angle, leaving the body to drop to the ground with a dull thud that reminded him all too well of being called cheese folk.

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The shop that was their agreed upon meeting place wasn’t too far away from the Basilica San Marco. Will had stepped into the shop, the bell above the door ringing loudly in the cramped space. From the outside it didn’t look any different from the other junk shops in Venice, cheap trinkets for those stupid enough to let themselves get sucked into them.

Glass shelves held vases and candles, mini gondolas and jewelry. China plates and old books were crammed together. Each one was marked up a ridiculous amount and would never tempt Will, but several tourists were busy looking through the items whispering solemnly among themselves as if they were in church.

Will tried to make himself look busy, but as he reached up for a statue on one of the shelves, he gasped, his other hand taking his wrist that was turning a deep purple color from having been grabbed and twisted at an odd angle. It was swollen, but Will doubted it was broken. It hurt enough though.

It had earned the man who now lay dead in some far off alley way an extra kick. But the scene was clean. Just a snapped neck like agreed upon. Nothing too devastating. Now if only Hannibal would show up, Will’s chest could unclench and then they could go home. Then at the end of the week Hannibal would be leaving for a few days and then Germany would be behind them completely. Everything would be taken care of and over and then they could focus on the now. Focus on the boys and themselves and have a few moments of clarity to finally breathe.

The bell on the door rang as it opened, the glass tinkling oddly as if it were the sound of fairy’s wings. Will’s eyes jumped up immediately and he frowned at the young couple that stepped in. His chest collapsed a bit further and he pulled his watch from his pocket to look at it, the bruising hurting too much for him to keep the item on his body any longer.

Time was up. But he could wait a moment longer, couldn’t he? Would Hannibal have just gone straight home or had the man become just as lost and attached as Will that even if the ten minutes were up that he would risk it to come and find Will? Because Will knew he would risk it to find Hannibal. Their planning was always meant well, but if it truly came down to it, then Will wasn’t sure it would be followed.

With a deep breath, he shoved his watch back into his pocket. If Hannibal were following their plan, the scolding Will would receive would be just as bad if not worse than finding Hannibal hurt. As much as it pained Will, he had to do what they had agreed to. Ten minutes and Hannibal wasn’t here. It was time to go home, pack the necessities, pick up the boys and head to their safe house in Sweden. Hannibal would meet them there if he had gotten caught up.

But that wasn't what had happened right? Will moved for the exit with a shake of his head. There was no way that that man could have laid a single finger to Hannibal. He was a sitting duck the moment he picked Hannibal as his chase over Will. It was a curious decision that Will supposed he would never receive an answer to, but the universe could keep that secret. It wasn't that important to know.

Will stepped back out into the morning sun that was beginning to pick up in heat, summer bearing down in full throttle. Despite the heat, Will's blood ran cold at the idea that maybe Hannibal had been hurt. Hannibal was punctual even with the flimsiest commitment. He wouldn't miss the ten-minute deadline without a reason.

Or maybe Will was thinking of the worse far too quickly. Maybe Hannibal had gotten carried away and spilt blood even though they had both said not to. Maybe he had to sneak home to not be seen. That could have very easily been the reason. Maybe Will was just overreacting. Maybe...

"Ethan," a voice called and Will's heart perked up, eyes darting around the ground in front of him to find the person who had called his name. When he finally found Hannibal among the market's swarm, Will let out a breath that had been captured up in his lungs. He broke into a sprint towards Hannibal whose hair had fallen into his eyes from whatever struggle he might have come from.

Hannibal snatched Will up in a hug and Will's heart beat wildly in his chest, as if excited to find the other man's still alive and beating behind another rib cage. The two breathed a sigh of relief at the presence of the other, though it was short lived as Hannibal pulled back far too quickly for Will's liking.

"We should get moving," Hannibal whispered, though his smile was warm when he regarded Will. "We don't want to draw more attention." He took Will's hand and Will did his best to hide his gasp at a sharp shoot of pain up his arm. Hannibal paused and looked down, taking in the deep bruising over Will's wrist, the smile falling instantly. "Is he-"

"Taken care of, I promise," Will assured, free hand pressing to Hannibal's chest to push the man in the direction of home. "There's nothing for you to avenge. I'm ok. Let's go. You can take care of me at home." Hannibal's eyes were dark, but he nodded, turning without another word and leading them both through the market square. "I thought something happened to you," Will whispered, keeping himself close to his husband as if Hannibal would somehow disappear if Will released him. "You're never late."

"Minor inconvenience," Hannibal muttered without looking down. "I'm sorry I worried you. It was not my intention. Thank you for following our agreement."

Will opened his mouth to speak, but swiftly shut it after he thought better of his admitting that he wasn't going to follow the plan. That he had thought about following the route he felt Hannibal would have taken to find his husband. That nothing, even their own stupid little rules, would ever separate them again, but he held it back.

The trip back home was made in silence, something a bit more tense than Will thought it would be and as much as he tried to feel out Hannibal, nothing came to him. The man was as blank as he wanted to be and that might as well have been the first page in a new notebook. There was nothing written there for Will to read and if he wanted something, he would have to write it himself.

They stepped into their house and Hannibal closed the door behind them. Will was simply going to make his way to the bathroom where the first aid kit was, but his uninjured arm was snatched up

and he was pulled back around and to a pair of lips.

Will's eyes were wide at the kiss that Hannibal gave him. Something deep and overpowering much like the wines they had been drinking as of late. Will found himself melting against Hannibal's body, something relaxing inside of him, something that had been wound up and tight since Germany and Will hadn't noticed.

"*Ti meriti di riposare. Lascia che mi prenda cura di te, amore mio*," *(You deserve to rest. Let me take care of you, my love)* Hannibal whispered, nuzzling his nose against Will's. "Let me take care of you."

"In what aspect?" Will tried to tease, but it came out more breathless than he meant it to. His fingers trembled as they found the buttons on Hannibal's shirt and began to tug at them. Will moaned at another kiss, knees going weak and mind swirling.

"Medical." Hannibal pulled back and Will whined softly, causing Hannibal to smile. He reached up and carefully took Will's wrists to stop the unbuttoning of his shirt and he placed a kiss to the tip of Will's nose. "Then I will take care of you however you wish, silly boy."

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"*Ciao*," a voice called from somewhere through the house and Morgan looked up from the book that Nonna Pia was reading to him in Italian. Walter paused in his drawing long enough to register the voice before returning to his doodling.

"In here!" Morgan called back, hopping from Nonna Pia's lap and racing for the front of the house.

Nonna Pia inhaled deeply and set the book aside, getting to her feet with a grunt, a sound that Walter assumed came from old age and aching joints. He did his best to ignore the way that when she stepped over, her fingers played with his hair in a very similar way that his mother's would and he had a sinking feeling that maybe all mother's touched their children in the same loving way and his mom had never really been all that special. Maybe he was just clinging to something that didn't truly matter. The thought was bitter in his mouth.

"*I tuoi genitori sono qui. Non vuoi andare a salutare?"* she asked in a kind voice. Walter shook his head and did his best to give Nonna Pia a smile to assure her that nothing was wrong, when he knew exactly what his parents had been doing. Exactly what his own hands had done only a few weeks ago and the thought alone made his hands tremble. There was a small gasp that made Walter jump slightly and he met Nonna Pia's gaze who was not looking at him. "Grant, *è bellissimo*."

He looked back down at the stupid little doodle he had been doing that he honestly didn't think was that amazing. It was just a rough sketch of The Girl With The Pearl Earring. It wasn't impressive, but Nonna Pia snatched it from him to look over it.

"-and we made Scampi In Busara for dinner!" Morgan's small voice continued to drone on, getting louder the closer the group came from the front of the house.

"Your son is quite the artist," Nonna Pia said, holding out the paper towards Will and Hannibal.

"He's quite good, isn't he?" Hannibal took the paper from Nonna Pia and Walter wanted to shrink down and hide away.

"That's stunning," Will said with a smile. "I didn't know you could draw so well, Grant."

Walter grumbled at the name and rolled his eyes. “Thanks.”

“Can we eat now?” Morgan asked impatiently, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“*Sì, ragazzo mio*,” Nonna Pia assured with a laugh. “They have been busy baking all day. I’m sure they’re excited to show you.”

“Sounds delightful to not have to cook for once,” Will teased, though Walter knew full well that Will never had to cook unless he wanted to, which wasn’t often.

“Ezra, would you please get the table set?” Nonna Pia questioned and Morgan nodded his head, racing off to get to work. “Grant, *anche tu. Avanti.*”

“Ok,” Walter muttered, getting from where he was curled up on the couch with a book on his lap as a table. He set it aside and took the drawing that Hannibal held out to him. Walter was slow to take it, looking over both men carefully, doing his best not to shift the delicate air in the room, but unable to help himself at the sight of Will’s bandaged wrist. So they had done something. Those men wouldn’t be outside tonight if Walter had any guess. He started towards the small dining table and held out the paper to Morgan who tipped his head curiously, setting a stack of plates down on the table top. “Here.”

“I can have it?” the young boy asked.

“I don’t want it.”

Morgan’s face lit up a bit more somehow. “*Grazie*!”

Walter rolled his eyes. “Not you too. Please let me have one normal thing in my life. Please only speak English.”

“Oh, ok,” Morgan muttered with a determined nod. “Did you want to do the cups?”

“Sure.”

“Smells wonderful,” Hannibal applauded as he stepped into the room. “I can’t wait to see what you made, boys.”

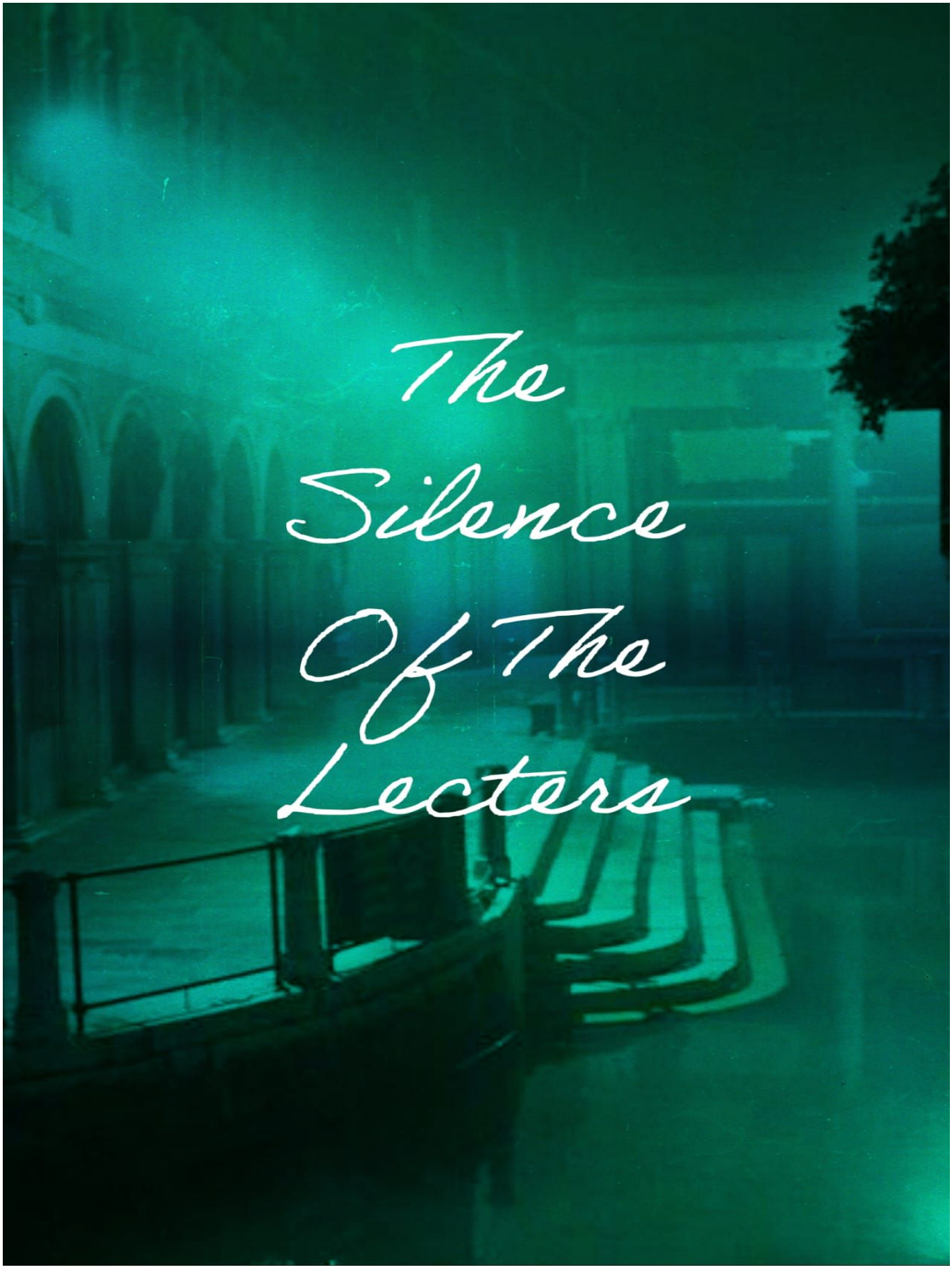
“Wait until the cake!” Morgan reached out for the plates to get back to work. “Grant worked really hard on it.”

# Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The freezer stood out brightly against the black backdrop of the room. The entirety of it was made up of glass. The glass was fogged and frosted, painted with delicate patterns of ice. Something was in the very center. Something dark and tall, not touching the floor.

He swallowed at the lump in his throat that seemed to be growing and cutting off his air supply. He licked his lips, willing his heart to slow, to relax. But he couldn’t bring himself to as the dark form swung as if pushed by a nonexistent breeze. A metal chain from the ceiling creaked and there was something so much more unsettling by how dazzlingly clean the chain was rather than how rusted and dirty he felt like it needed to be.


The
Silence
Of The
Lecters

**Morgan: Age 7**

**Walter: Age 14**

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Walter's phone was held firmly in Morgan's hands, and Morgan's tongue was stuck out mindlessly as he tried to keep the phone steady. Not that Walter was moving much, but he wanted to make sure the recording was perfect for their parents.

It wasn't that Will and Hannibal didn't enjoy going to Walter's games or supporting Walter. They had just figured that it was safer for them to stay home, to not draw more attention to themselves than they needed. Morgan hadn't really tried to understand the full meaning of those words. He did his best to just accept whatever Will and Hannibal told him and to just roll with it, but Walter had never truly been like that. Walter had to dig into everything and Morgan realized that it just left Walter upset.

Morgan didn't want to be upset, so he just let it be. Will and Hannibal felt safer in their villa by the canal than at Walter's soccer game and that was fine. Morgan could record the games for them to watch at home. They always seemed to enjoy that.

It also wasn't often that Walter and Morgan got to go out on their own. Morgan found himself not straying too far from home. He didn't really have many friends so there wasn't anyone to hang out with and he doubted that anyone would enjoy the things that he enjoyed, so he spent a good portion of his time with Hannibal.

But when Walter came home from school, things always seemed to lighten up, even if Walter had a bad day. It made life a little less dull to be with Walter and so any chance Morgan had to go do something with the older boy, Morgan jumped at it. Even if that meant sitting in itchy grass on a hot day while Walter stopped footballs from going into a goal for over an hour, he would take it.

The small crowd of families around Morgan cheered as a ball was kicked to Walter and Walter dove, stopping the ball. Walter got back to his feet, ball in hand and jersey and knees grass stained. He took a few good running steps and let the ball drop, kicking it all the way back up the field.

Morgan followed the action with the phone and nearly sneezed as the sunlight blinded him. He did his best to push the tickling away and gave a sigh of relief as the referee blew his whistle, signaling the end of the game. Morgan lowered the phone to his lap and waited while Walter jogged across the field and to his team that were all gathering on the line to wish the other team a good game.

Once done, Walter rushed over to him and Morgan held out a water bottle to Walter, who took it with a grateful nod and took a large mouthful, swishing it around and gargling it before spitting it out. Morgan tipped his head to the side in question at the almost ritualistic action that Walter took whenever he drank water after exercising.

"Why do you do that?"

Walter held up a singular finger as he downed the water bottle. He crushed the empty bottle and tossed it to the grass, where Morgan picked it up. "It supposedly helps remove the air bubbled from your stomach so you don't get cramps," Walter explained, ripping at the hem of the long sleeved goalie shirt he had to wear over his normal jersey. He pulled it over his head and shook out his sweat damp hair. Next came the gloves that had some special sort of grip on them to better stick to the ball. The velcro was tugged at by Walter's teeth and both gloves were shed. "Fuck, it's hot."

“Do you need more water?” Morgan got to his feet, holding out Walter’s phone to him. Walter took it and shoved it into his shorts pocket. Morgan grabbed up Walter’s backpack and tossed it over his shoulder, turning so Walter could shove the goalie shirt and gloves into it.

“I’m fine,” Walter assured. “But we can stop for gelato on the way home if you want.”

“Is it because you won?” Morgan turned back around to face a confused and sweaty look. “You only like to get gelato if you win.”

Walter blinked at realization. “I guess it’s a mini reward.”

The two boys began the long walk home from Walter’s school, Walter’s cleats clomping loudly on the sidewalk. They stopped for gelato, each with a little cup that was quickly melting as they continued to walk home.

“Do you think we’ll have to do combat when we get home?” Walter asked in a grumble and Morgan shrugged.

“Your game or practice has never stopped it before,” Morgan answered simply before shoving a spoonful of dessert into his mouth. “You hate it that much?”

“Don’t you?” Walter asked back, kicking at a rock with his cleat, their speed slowing down dramatically as if they could somehow stop the inevitable if they just walked slow enough.

“I don’t mind it,” Morgan answered, head tilting side to side in thought. “I think it’s kinda fun. In a boot camp kind of way.”

“You’ve never been to boot camp,” Walter snorted around a spoonful.

“So? I’m sure we could do whatever they do better than they could.”

“You think you’re so smart now, don’t you?”

Morgan shrugged once more. “Smarter than you. You still can’t speak German.”

“Why you little!” Walter reached out for Morgan, but the smaller boy broke into a sprint down the street with a laugh, his gelato falling to the ground. “Hey, you’re not supposed to run off alone!” Walter rolled his eyes, watching the little boy disappear. As much as he didn’t want to babysit the boy, he knew what was expected of him, what had always been expected of him. Walter took one more bite of his treat before picking up Morgan’s mess and throwing both away.

He was a little worn from the game, but the burn in his legs felt satisfying as he sprinted his way into an alley and towards St. Mark’s square. Saturdays were always busier than normal, but that only made finding Morgan a bit more fun. All he had to do was find the backpack. Normally that would be an impossible endeavor with the number of tourists around the square, but that backpack was special. It was the one that Walter had had since leaving with his mom to live with his grandparents. The backpack he had taken to the Vergers and then onto Europe. It had always been with him.

It was simple and grey, stained and worn, but there was a Green Lantern logo on it. And lord have mercy on all of Walter’s friends who had never read a comic before in their lives and didn’t know what a DC superhero was.

No one else in the entirety of the world had that same bag, Walter was certain. Only little Morgan would have that bag and Morgan wouldn't be hard to pick out in a crowd. He still looked like a stuffy private schooler even though he had never stepped foot in anything other than Hannibal's Dictating Academy where the uniform might as well have been black tie.

Afternoon heat be damned. There was that white button up with the stupid tie and dress shorts. And there was that backpack. Morgan was hidden within a group of children who were busy looking on at a man who was covered in pigeons as if he were their nest.

Walter stepped through the crowd of people and was swift to snatch up Morgan from the group of kids, throwing the boy up and over his shoulder. Morgan gave a small laugh. "I thought you wouldn't find me this time!"

"You stick out like a sore thumb, kid," Walter huffed, shifting Morgan a bit more and starting off through the crowd.

"Put me down, Grant," Morgan ordered with another laugh, hands gripping to Walter's shirt tightly to make sure he didn't fall, though he knew Walter wouldn't drop him.

"You need to dress like everyone else if you want to blend in, Einstein."

"Put me down. I can walk by myself." Walter rolled his eyes as Morgan kicked his legs and let the boy back to his feet. "Last one home has to do the dishes."

"I always do the dishes," Walter grumbled with a roll of his eyes. "You wouldn't do them even if I won."

"Tonight is fondue. You know how hard it is to get the cheese out of the pot once it sets." Morgan took a large and teasing step back and away from Walter. "Last one home has to wash the pot?" Before Walter even had a chance to answer, Morgan broke into a sprint away from Walter who hurried after the boy and back towards their villa.

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*The freezer stood out brightly against the black backdrop of the room. The entirety of it was made up of glass. The glass was fogged and frosted, painted with delicate patterns of ice. Something was in the very center. Something dark and tall, not touching the floor.*

*He swallowed at the lump in his throat that seemed to be growing and cutting off his air supply. He licked his lips, willing his heart to slow, to relax. But he couldn't bring himself to as the dark form swung as if pushed by a nonexistent breeze. A metal chain from the ceiling creaked and there was something so much more unsettling by how dazzlingly clean the chain was rather than how rusted and dirty he felt like it needed to be.*

*Before he could stop himself, he stepped towards the freezer door, reaching a hand out towards the frigid glass. With a single push, it opened up for him, swinging back to paint a far more vivid picture than he had ever wanted to see.*

*A woman hung from a large and imposing meat hook driven through her shoulder. Her winter clothes were stained red, but not from where the metal pierced skin. It was a bit lower and around her heart.*

*Her skin was blue, her lips purple and she shivered. Still alive. Her breath flittered about her like a snow flurry. Her dirty blond hair fell in curtains around her face, and it wasn't until he took a step closer that her head jolted up and he was met with frozen blue eyes and color drained hollowed cheeks.*

*"Mom?" There was no recognition in her eyes as they looked over her son. He rushed forward and took her icy hands in his, trying to find something, anything to help. "I'll get you down."*

*"He's behind you now."*

*His blood turned to slush at the words from the woman, her voice hoarse from the cold. He didn't dare turn. He knew what he would find.*

*"He's behind you now."*

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A strong grip snatched up Walter's shoulder and he nearly screamed, his hand shooting out in front of him to protect himself from the monster that grabbed him. There was a muffled cry and the grip on Walter disappeared.

Walter sat up, cold sweat running down his spine and making him shiver as he tried to catch his breath. His head dropped into his hands, and he did his best to push the picture of his frozen mother from his mind's eyes.

There was a whimper and Walter looked up to find Morgan clutching to his face, hands dripping blood. Walter's eyes widened, his heart rocketing once more through his chest like he had taken a shot of adrenaline.

"I'm sorry," he whispered quickly, ripping the tangled sheets from his body and getting from the bed. "I didn't mean-I'm sorry."

"'urts," Morgan said through his hands, tears running down his cheeks.

"Let's clean you up. I'm sorry."

"I's 'lright."

Walter guided Morgan from the bedroom and to the bathroom across the hall, flicking on the light and getting to work to help stop the bloody nose. Crimson had marked their trail through the hall and was puddling on the floor of the bathroom as Morgan pressed toilet paper to his nose, the paper annoyingly getting stuck to some of the drying blood on his fingers.

"Are you ok Wally?" Morgan questioned when he saw the way Walter's hands shook as he wet down a rag to start cleaning up the mess.

"Fine," he excused, trembling fingers struggling to turn off the facet. "Just fine."

"Was it your mom again?" Walter's hands froze and he looked over at Morgan who had the same ice blue in his eyes that his mother had as she hung frozen there. "You don't have to tell me if you-"

"That room," Walter whispered, causing Morgan to fall silent. "That room that I wouldn't let you in. I can't stop dreaming of that room."

“What room?” Morgan rubbed at his nose and reached for some new toilet paper to apply to his still flowing injury.

“Father’s room.” Walter ringed out the rag and turned to Morgan, taking one of his hands and beginning to clean it. “In Germany. It...”

“Was it that bad?”

Walter licked his lips with a deep inhale and plastered a smile over his lips with a shake of his head. “No. Forget I said anything about it.” Walter’s other hand ruffled Morgan’s hair. “I’m just glad you don’t get nightmares anymore.”

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**Morgan: Age 8**

**Walter: Age 15**

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“Hey Einstein,” Walter called as he stepped into the kitchen for breakfast, messing up the boy’s hair that had been gelled down into perfection. Morgan hissed and hit away Walter’s hand, returning his attention to his book where he sat at the small breakfast table.

“You’re up earlier than normal,” Will commented from where he was working at the coffee press. “School doesn’t start-”

“I’m going out for breakfast,” Walter answered, taking the cup of coffee that Will held out to him and adding a single cube of sugar to it.

“Out?” Hannibal turned from where he was positioned at the stove, frying pan on with eggs and bacon sizzling away in it. “We didn’t-”

“Last minute,” Walter excused with a shrug.

Morgan looked up from his book with a confused questioning expression. Walter just shot the younger kid a smile before sipping down a gulp of far too hot coffee. Walter winced and Morgan couldn’t help but give a small snort of laughter at the pain before his eyes once more dropped to his book, something that looked almost as big as the boy.

“*Mangustėli,”* Hannibal scolded lightly. “You know that you’re supposed to discuss-”

“I’m nearly sixteen. Can’t I make my own choices by now?” Walter groaned, setting his cup aside with a roll of his eyes.

“You’re going with Mia, aren’t you?” Morgan questioned, though he didn’t meet the dark gaze that came from Walter at the question.

“Mia?” Will asked with a hint of a tease to his tone. He stepped over to Hannibal and held out Hannibal’s cup of coffee. Hannibal took it, though his attention was fully on Walter. “Who is Mia?”

“No one,” Walter grumbled, hurriedly hiding his face back into his coffee.

“His girlfriend,” Morgan replied boredly. “He’s wearing enough cologne to put a perfume shop to shame.”

“How on earth can you smell-”

“If you’re going on a date, I would suggest toning it down,” Hannibal offered as he plated the breakfast that he had made now for one less person. “I didn’t want to comment on the excessiveness of the scent, but your brother is right.”

“Not my brother,” Walter hissed tightly, setting his empty cup aside and racing back for the stairs.

“A dab of rubbing alcohol should do the trick,” Hannibal called after the teen as he placed Morgan’s plate in front of him. “No reading during meals Morgan.” He kindly reached out and caressed the boy’s face. “You can expand your mind outside of mealtime. Mealtime is for the family.”

“Then why does Wally get to leave?” Morgan complained, setting the book aside. There was something annoying with the way Walter always got away with anything and everything he wanted. First it was swearing and then it was going to school and playing sports and now it was girls. It made Morgan’s insides squirm, though he wasn’t sure if it was with jealousy or not.

“Because he is older,” Will explained, sitting beside Morgan at the breakfast nook with his own cup of coffee and a plate of food. “When you are old enough to start dating, we can discuss you going out to breakfast.”

“What happened with Gianna?” Hannibal took his own seat beside Will and reached for the butter to add to his slice of toast.

“Was she before or after Stella?” Will asked.

“After Stella, before Francesca,” Morgan muttered.

“But I thought Bianca was the last-”

“She was before Alessandra,” Hannibal supplied. “But he went out with Gianna again, so what happened to her?”

Morgan shrugged as he crunched on some bacon. “Wally said that she spoke funny. Stopped speaking to her.”

“Did he?” Will frowned.

“Rude,” Hannibal added, pushing his cup of coffee in front of Morgan. Morgan’s brows tipped up curiously at the gesture. “We will have to discuss that when he comes home.”

Loud footsteps bounded down the stairs and Walter swung back into the kitchen with his backpack over his shoulder and smelling more appropriately than before. He moved around the tiny table, giving Will a half hug and then Hannibal before once more messing up Morgan’s hair.

“Wally!” Morgan complained loudly, hands rushing to his head to fix the disarray before returning back to the table. “Stop that.”

“I’ll be back after school,” Walter explained to his parents before leaning over to Morgan's ear. “Snitches get stitches,” he whispered, calling Morgan’s surprised eyes to him. “Remember that, Einstein.” He ruffled Morgan’s hair again and raced from the house. “Bye!”

“Have a good day!” Will called after the teen before turning his attention back to Morgan who was fixing his hair agitatedly. “After breakfast you and I are going to be going out on the boat.”

Morgan frowned, worrying at his lip with his teeth and effectively tearing at the skin. It wasn’t a large habit, but Morgan had taken to doing it whenever water was mentioned in the slightest and he tried to ignore the disproving look that Hannibal gave him. It was clear that Hannibal found the habit nasty, having said as much in an attempt to help Morgan break from it, but it did nothing but make Morgan more self-conscious about it.

Hannibal had said that it was due to anxiety, whatever that meant. Morgan wasn’t fully certain he knew the definition of the word but he had read enough books that he was certain he understood the feeling of the word. He assumed that it was the scared feeling he got when he came close to bodies of water any larger than a bathtub.

“You have to learn, *kleiner hase*,” Hannibal said in a gentle tone, but Morgan didn’t look up, just grabbed his fork and cut into his egg, watching as the yolk ran over his plate. “International waters are safe and-”

“I know,” Morgan whispered with a small nod. “I know.”

“Have a drink.” Hannibal motioned to the cup of coffee. Morgan straightened up curiously and eyed Hannibal carefully before looking at a confused Will. Obviously, they hadn’t discussed allowing Morgan to drink coffee. “It’s black. You might want to add some sugar or cream. It’s a touch bitter.”

Morgan reached out to the cup and pulled the steaming mug to himself, looking at the dark liquid in it for a moment before reaching out to the small cream dish on the table. He was about to pour it in when a type of residue on the cup caught his eye. Hannibal would never allow there to be a dirty dish in this house.

“I think I’d rather you drink it,” Morgan announced, trying to catch Hannibal’s eyes, but the man was busying himself with getting some food on his fork. “Or maybe you should, Dad.” Morgan pushed the mug across the table and towards Will, who tipped his head, reaching out for the coffee. Hannibal didn’t react. “Drink it.”

“I thought that you would be excited to have a big boy drink, *kleiner hase*,” Hannibal taunted, though it was light in his voice. He took a bite of food and set his fork and knife aside. “Why are you being so cruel to your dad?”

“Drink it,” Morgan pushed once more, reaching out for his own slice of toast and taking a bite of it happily. “I don’t think I’d like it much. I might stick with tea for a few more years.”

“What’s wrong with it?” Will asked, placing the cup back towards the middle of the table.

“I don’t think even the bitterness of coffee would disguise the taste as well as you might think,” Morgan answered, finally able to meet Hannibal’s eyes that were shining a bit behind a smirk. “And I doubt that something as thin as coffee would be able to hide the texture. Dissolved pills leave behind a chalky residue on your tongue.”

“Pills?” Hannibal asked innocently.

“This isn’t your first time attempting to poison someone, Father.” Morgan finished off his plate with a small smile. “You know how many painkillers it takes to disable or kill someone. You might make me sick and maybe you could finish the job manually, but even I would take quite a bit of pills to take down now. You’d be better off getting Dad sick with the amount that is bound to be in that single cup.” Morgan got from the table and took his dishes to the sink, washing them off and putting them in the dishwasher before moving back to the table to snatch up his book. “Call me when you’re ready to leave. Love you.” Morgan pressed a kiss to Will and Hannibal’s cheeks in turn before heading for the stairs and disappearing up them.

“They’re getting good,” Will sighed, hiding his face in his hands.

“Are you feeling guilty?” Hannibal asked softly as he turned in his chair to better face Will. Will looked back up with a smile.

“Proud.”

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“I can’t believe you still have that thing,” Walter muttered as Morgan entered his room that night, the rabbit that Will had given him held tightly in his grip. Walter was going to return his thoughts to his homework when there was a sniffle behind him and he turned fully in his desk chair to see the young boy clutching the rabbit to his chest in the very same way that he had on the airplane their first night as a new family. Those big blue eyes were teary and Morgan’s bottom lip was pulled between his teeth and being chewed. “What’s wrong?”

Morgan shook his head and hid his face in the rabbit that was flattened out from how often it was held. Walter sighed and set his pencil down, getting from his desk chair and stepping over to where Morgan stood. He knelt down in front of the kid and took his shoulders protectively.

“They had you go out on the boat again, didn’t they?” Morgan nodded, but didn’t look up, sniffling once more though it was muffled. “You can say no.” Morgan shook his head, no argument on his tongue. “They won’t make you if you say no.” Another shake of a young head. “Ok, ok. Come here,” Walter whispered, scooping Morgan up into his arms. He stepped over to the bed and rested Morgan on it. “I have a surprise, but you need to make sure that this stays between us. We can’t let Father know, alright?”

Morgan’s head popped up curiously, hands still trembling as they clutched to the bunny. He waited as Walter went to his closet and began to dig through it. It took a moment or two before Walter finally returned with a laptop. He opened the lid and Morgan’s eyes widened.

“Where did you get this?”

“Giovanni gave it to me,” Walter explained and Morgan nodded in understanding. Giovanni and Walter had become good friends after meeting at school. It was around the time that Walter and Morgan had been buried alive, if Morgan was remembering correctly. He had only seen Giovanni a few times, Walter not liking to bring his friends home. He preferred to disappear for hours at a time at Giovanni’s home instead, leaving Morgan alone even more. “We’re going to watch something that even you would enjoy. It’s called Casablanca.”

“A movie?”

The word was so foreign sounding coming from Morgan that Walter paused and looked at the young boy. “Even you know what those are, Einstein. Come on.” Walter reached out and went to ruffle the boy’s hair, but stopped, simply patting his head instead. Walter sat back on the bed, groaning when Morgan sat himself on Walter’s lap at a very uncomfortable angle. Walter adjusted them with a wince, allowing the kid to burrow against him as the movie began.

Morgan was silent through the movie, so quiet that at some point Walter thought that Morgan had fallen asleep. But when Walter glanced down, he found Morgan still holding to that damn rabbit with his lip between his teeth. At the taste of copper, Morgan let his lip fall from his teeth and his hand went to it to stop the run of red over his chin. His lip stung brightly and he sighed.

“What the hell, Einstein?” Walter scolded, reaching over to his bedside table for a tissue, pressing it to Morgan’s lip. “Keep that there.” Morgan obeyed and Walter stopped the movie, getting from the bed and disappearing into the hall, leaving Morgan alone and staring at the black and white image on the screen. Soon, Walter returned with a first aid kit and sat on the edge of the bed, digging through it until he found disinfectant and ripped open the small package. “Why do you keep doing this? You need to stop,” Walter grumbled as he pressed the alcohol wipe to Morgan’s lip to clean it. Morgan winced, eyes scrunching closed at the sharpness the alcohol shot through his lip. “No one is going to want to kiss you when you grow up if you keep chewing on your lip.”

“Kiss me?” Morgan asked, confused at the prospect. He had seen his moms kiss every now and then and had seen Will and Hannibal kiss but had never once considered the possibility that someone would ever kiss him.

Walter nodded and lowered the wipe, reaching for some gauze and pressing it to Morgan’s mouth. “Hold that there,” he instructed. Morgan obeyed, holding the gauze in place while Walter cleaned up the first aid kit. “Stop making your lip bleed.” Walter set the first aid kit aside and got to his feet, digging through his dresser until he pulled out a t-shirt, tossing it to Morgan. “Put that on. We need to soak your shirt.”

“How do you know that?” Morgan asked, curiosity pulling at him as he tried to pull his shirt over his head without letting more blood fall from his lip.

“My mom showed me,” Walter replied, something quiet in his tone. “I got a bloody nose once and I thought it ruined one of my favorite shirts.”

Morgan gave a defeated sigh, shirt tangled around his head. He let the gauze go and set it on the bedside table and pulled his shirt off to pull on Walter’s. It hung awkwardly on his body, far too big for his slim size, falling off one shoulder. He snatched back up the gauze and watched as Walter took the discarded shirt from the room and to the bathroom across the hall. The water ran for a moment before Walter returned to the room.

“Are you ok?” Walter asked as he added the damp shirt to his hamper. He moved back over to the bed and pulled at the gauze from Morgan’s lip to look over it. “Keep the pressure,” Walter said in a soft tone before climbing back onto the bed, letting Morgan climb back onto his lap to begin the movie again.

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**Morgan: Age 9**

**Walter: Age 16**

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Morgan gasped, coughing as his back hit one of the blue matts, knocking the air from his lungs. He struggled to inhale, curling up on his side when Walter unpinned him. Walter was breathing deeply as he fell onto his back beside Morgan with a chuckle.

“Good, Walter,” Hannibal praised from the edge of the mats. “Breathe Morgan.”

“Best three out of five?” Walter teased, patting the gasping Morgan on the shoulder before getting to his feet.

Morgan closed his eyes, finally able to catch a breath. Tears pricked his eyes and he curled up on himself a little further at the dull ache that was carving each and every bone in his body. There was a gentle touch to his shoulder and he looked up at Will who held out a water bottle to him. Morgan sat up and took it, taking a drink, the cool water relieving a bit of his cottonmouth.

“Morgan,” Will whispered so softly that Morgan wasn’t even sure he had heard him at all. “I’ve told you this before. Walter is bigger than you. Anyone who comes after us will be bigger than you and will not hold back like your brother does. You can’t depend on strength to help you.”

Morgan passed back the water bottle and wiped at the water that dripped down his chin. “Play dirty,” he muttered.

“Play dirty,” Will agreed with a nod. “He might have the brawn, but you have the brains.” Will tapped Morgan’s forehead and smiled at Morgan’s look of dislike. “Use it.”

“Come on, Einstein,” Walter called from across the room. “I’ve got to get to practice in a few.”

“Take him down.” With those final words, Will got back to his feet and returned to Hannibal’s side, the bottle set aside. Will folded his arms over his chest with a small snort as he watched the two boys set up for another go.

“What are you so smug about?” Hannibal asked, glancing at Will for a moment before looking back at the boys.

“If Morgan wins this round then you take us out for dinner tonight,” Will bargained.

“Where to?”

“McDonalds.” There was a slight pause to Hannibal’s answer and Will smiled brightly as he took in Hannibal’s calculating expression. “Are you scared?”

“You know something that I don’t know,” Hannibal mused thoughtfully, a hand rubbing at his chin. “What did you tell him?”

“Size is not an advantage.”

“If Walter wins, you have to go to the gala this weekend with me in that suit I had made for you.”

Will’s face twisted into dislike as he thought over the suit that had been gifted to him. He had given in and started wearing things a bit more on the dressier side, but if he had to wear something with deep emerald paisley on it, he would surely die.

“Deal,” he finally agreed, watching as Morgan dove down towards Walter’s legs, wrapping himself around the teen’s ankles.

“What the hell?” Walter asked with a laugh, bending over to grab at Morgan. “Let go.”

“No,” Morgan said with a shake of his head, tightening his grip.

“How many times could I have shot or stabbed you by now?” Walter tugged at the child. “This is ridiculous. You’d be dead.” With a tug of one of his legs, Walter broke Morgan's grip and pulled Morgan from the ground and up over his shoulder like a sack of flour. “Knock it off.”

Morgan glanced around. Will was right, he was no match for Walter. He was smaller, weaker. He couldn’t possibly take Walter down by any means other than playing dirty. He had to use his surroundings and whatever he had in reach as a weapon and at the moment that wasn’t much, but it would do.

With quick hands, Morgan snatched up the back of Walter’s shirt, pulling at it until the collar went tight around Walter’s neck. It hurt his knuckles with how harshly he pulled it and he could immediately feel Walter’s body jerk at the action. Walter gagged and Morgan only pulled it tighter.

“Let go,” Morgan ordered.

“This is s-stupid,” Walter hissed out hoarsely with a shake of his head.

Morgan choked up on the shirt and felt Walter’s body bend and his knees go weak. “Let me go, Wally. Now.”

Walter dropped down to his knees and released Morgan, who in turn let go of Walter’s shirt that was now wrinkled with how tightly he had had a grip on it. As soon as Walter was free, he coughed and sputtered for air, a hand going to his throat, the other on the floor to keep him upright.

“Best five out of seven?”

“Shut up.”

“Walter, when you get home from practice, we’ll go out for dinner,” Will announced, shooting Hannibal a smile.

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Morgan winced and looked up from the book he was reading at an incorrect chord on the piano. Walter’s face was screwed up in something between concentration and frustration and he leaned closer to the sheet music as if he couldn’t see it from where he had been sitting.

“It’s an E double sharp,” Hannibal’s voice called from somewhere in the kitchen and Morgan could only watch as Walter rolled his eyes so hard that they almost fell from his head.

“Fucking E double sharp my ass,” Walter hissed through his teeth. “Why the fuck are there even E sharps? E double sharp. Why not just write F sharp? It’s not that hard. That’s a stupid fucking ass note.”

“Language,” Hannibal’s voice warned, causing Morgan to smile with a small snort of laughter.

Walter’s gaze shot over the sheet music and to Morgan who swiftly hid behind his book. “You think this is funny? Why don’t you come over here and try to play this shit?”

“I don’t know how to,” Morgan answered, voice muffled from the book. “Father won’t let me take lessons yet. You know that.”

“Let you take lessons.” Walter’s gaze returned to the music and he frowned. “More like forces you.” He started the section once more and at the same spot missed the same note. With a growl, he slammed his hands down onto the keyboard, making a loud clash of tones ring out and Morgan could hear the knife in the kitchen come to a sudden halt.

“We do not take out our violent emotions on the musical instruments, Walter. Would it help if I came and showed you how-”

“No!” Walter groaned, letting his head fall onto the opened lid of the piano. “No, it wouldn’t.”

“I thought it sounded pretty, Wally,” Morgan offered, keeping himself still hidden behind his book.

There was a deep sigh and Walter slowly sat upright, meeting Morgan’s gaze. “Thanks kid.”

Morgan’s smile was bright and genuine, and he snuggled back down into the couch with his book to listen to Walter practice. “Welcome.”

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**Morgan: Age 10**

**Walter: Age 17**

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“Would you go to sleep please?” Walter grumbled as Morgan continued to toss and turn. “I’m going to make you go back to your bed if you don’t knock it off.”

“You say that every night,” Morgan contradicted.

“I mean it. You’re too old to be doing this anymore. We’re not kids.”

“I am.”

“I’m not.” The words were a hiss and Walter turned his back on the boy, leaving Morgan with the oddness of the conversation being ended rather swiftly. “Shut up and sleep.”

“But it feels like someone’s watching me.”

Walter groaned and flopped onto his back, rubbing at his eyes. “Do you have anatidaephobia or something?”

Morgan huffed and folded his arms over his chest, turning away from Walter. “Ducks don’t scare me.”

“Morgan,” Walter groaned. “Please. I have a test tomorrow and Father is going to have my ass if I fail this one. Please just sleep.”

“But it really does feel like someone is watching me,” Morgan argued in a whine.

“Like the monster under the bed? Do you need me to check the closet?”

“I’m not four.”

“No, but you’re acting like it,” Walter shot back, sitting up in bed. “Why do you feel like someone is watching you?”

“I think I keep seeing the same man hanging around the house or outside your school or the soccer fields. He follows us around.” Morgan turned back to look over Walter’s face in the dim room, a bored expression meeting him. “I’m serious, Wally! He kept walking back and forth behind me at your last game.”

“That’s it. You’re going back to your room. I can’t do it tonight.”

Morgan shot up in bed, shaking his head. “No. He sits outside my window. I don’t like it, Wally.”

“Your window...” Walter muttered softly, eyes darting to the closed door and in the direction of Morgan’s room. “How long has this been going on?”

“I noticed him a game or two ago. He doesn't have kids playing and he never seems to be there for anyone, but he hangs close to us. Have you not noticed?”

“I try to ignore things like that. It makes a bigger mess than there needs to be,” Walter explained as he pushed the blanket off him. Walter carefully climbed over the top of Morgan and went for the door. “Stay here.”

Walter left the room and sighed with a roll of his eyes. He tried to look back through his mind to see if he could place one singular person that kept popping up in his day-to-day life outside of the ordinary and normal, but he couldn’t exactly place anything abnormal happening. Nothing was out of place.

Walter pushed open the door to Morgan’s room, looking over the cleanliness with a frown. He could never keep his room as immaculate as Morgan could, but he supposed that he had been sharing his room since he had met Morgan, so it only made sense that the up tight little snot was able to keep everything tidy.

Walter didn’t dare turn on the light, but he stepped through the room and to the window that looked out and over the canal, ready to dismiss whatever the scaredy cat thought was there, but he stopped. Bobbing in the canal sat a boat. It was small with an engine that wouldn’t be too horribly loud to start up if it needed to. Inside of the boat sat a man.

The moon was bright enough to highlight the man’s face, but it only cast that much more of him into shadow. Walter’s eyes narrowed as he tried to make out more details of the man, while keeping his distance from the window to make sure he wasn’t seen.

White, late 40’s, dark hair that had a bit of a wave to it that reminded Walter of Morgan’s when Morgan’s got a little too long. His cheekbones and nose were well defined and sharp, something even that much more familiar in them, though he couldn’t place what it was.

It felt like something deeper than the idea of the man sticking out due to Walter being tailed day in and day out. It was too dark for Walter to place the man anywhere in the background of his memories, but that didn’t mean that he wasn’t there.

Walter wanted to study the man a bit longer, but when he turned and Walter felt like their eyes met, Walter stepped back and out of the room, his heart pounding up into his throat. He inhaled deeply to catch his breath that had become suddenly short, and he made his way back to his room.

“Come with me,” he instructed Morgan, who confusedly obeyed. He came into the hall and Walter took his shoulder, guiding him down the hall and towards the back end of the hallway.

“What are you doing?” Morgan asked when they finally came to stand outside of their parent’s room. “We’re not supposed to-” Morgan broke off when Walter knocked on the door and he stepped slightly behind Walter. “They’re going to get mad.”

“No, they won’t,” Walter assured softly. “You have to tell them.”

“But I could be imagining it, Wally.”

“You’re not imagining it,” Walter assured.

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Will’s eyes opened at a light knocking on their bedroom door. He nearly went back to sleep with how soft the sound had been, but Hannibal’s movement brought him back to the surface.

“Can you answer the door?” Hannibal’s sleepy voice asked through the darkness. Will shivered as a kiss was pressed to the back of his bare shoulder. “I need to get dressed.”

Will groaned with a small nod and a yawn, pushing himself up from the bed. He ran his fingers through his tangled curls and then scratched at his beard that was beginning to grow in a little too much and needed to be trimmed. He opened the door and looked down on his children, one much taller than the other, the smaller one hidden behind the older, who was straightening himself up a bit.

“Dad, Morgan needs to tell you something,” Walter announced, sounding far more awake than Will was.

“It can wait until morning-”

“It can’t wait until morning,” Walter pushed, reaching down to pull Morgan in front of him. “You need to tell them.”

“Tell us what?” Will asked, voice gravely with sleep. He glanced once more between the boys and then over his shoulder to where Hannibal was now fully clothed with no evidence of their sexcapades from earlier that night. Will pushed the door fully open and stepped out of the way, causing both boys to look over him curiously as if they couldn’t believe they were allowed inside of the room. Maybe they had been too strict with the boys. “Sit on the bed,” Will instructed.

Walter and Morgan stepped into the room and Morgan seemed to hesitate. Hannibal flicked on a lamp and Will reached out, taking Morgan’s shoulder in reassurance.

“You’re not mad that we woke you up?” Morgan asked in a small voice.

“You would only come to us if it were important and couldn’t wait,” Will assured, pushing Morgan kindly towards the bed in the center of the room. Hannibal sat on the edge of the bed and patted it,

giving Morgan enough encouragement that the child climbed up and next to Hannibal. “What’s wrong Morgan?”

When there wasn’t an answer, Walter gave an annoyed little breath and Will did his best to warn his oldest with a look. Walter’s temper was shorter than even Will’s was. Walter’s fuse was not only short, but constantly alight and would be used up in an instant if anything too good happened.

“Tell them, Einstein. Come on,” Walter pushed, folding his arms over his chest. Morgan glanced around the group and Will did his best not to cling to the discomfort from the child. Morgan would tell them everything, he didn’t have to dig, didn’t have to feel if he didn’t want to. So he stayed back, allowing Morgan to speak.

“A man has been following me,” Morgan muttered softly. “Or us, I guess.”

“Is that true?” Hannibal asked, voice serious as he met Walter’s gaze. “You didn’t say anything about this.”

“I didn’t know it was happening,” Walter defended. “He’s outside the house now though. He’s been hanging outside of Morgan’s bedroom window in a boat.”

“How long?” Will pushed, his body now fully awake. It was happening again. Their small comfort was going to come crashing down around them and Will let out a breath at the idea. They had been here happily for years, but it was only bound to be a faux comfort. Will should have known better than to think that they could stay here happily.

“A few weeks,” Morgan whispered. “Around the house. When Walter and I go to games or practices. When we go to the market.”

“Do you know him?” Morgan looked at Hannibal as he answered with a shake of his head. Hannibal got to his feet and moved towards the bedroom door. “And he’s outside now?”

“He was before we came to speak to you, but he might have seen me,” Walter further explained. “But I don’t recognize him.”

“You two stay here,” the killer instructed, hand resting on the door handle to the bedroom. “I will handle this.”

“Do we need to leave?” Morgan asked, getting down from the bed. “I don’t want to move again.”

“We can be packed and ready to leave in thirty,” Walter contracted easily with determination that had Hannibal smiling lightly.

“Let’s not be so hasty.” Hannibal opened the bedroom door and stepped out into the hall. Will bit his bottom lip and followed Hannibal.

“Do you think it’s wise to confront him?”

“If we don’t, how are we to know what he wants?” Hannibal paused in the hall and looked back at Will and then over Will’s shoulder to where his sons were hanging out through the bedroom door to listen. “I just want to see if he’s still there. See if we know him. We’ll go from there.”

Before Will could contradict, Hannibal was stepping into Morgan’s room. Will followed and looked towards the window that’s curtain was pulled all the way up. Indeed, there was a man in a boat

down below in the canal. Will's head tipped to the side and he frowned, taking in the features on the man that he could make out in the darkness.

There was something familiar about the man, though Will couldn't exactly place it. Something from so very long ago. Something that could have very well been a dream with how absolutely fuzzy it was. He shared a glance with Hannibal who raised his brows knowingly, staying silent and allowing Will to connect the dots that he needed to.

He had been in pain. Will knew that much. His thumb ached and he wore fabric that was itchy and did nothing to keep the winter cold out. It was orange. The house he was in was as cold and pretty as Hannibal's had been, but maybe that was how all doctor's liked to decorate. He had walked around the house he had never once been invited to, and he did his best not to think of himself as a creep. But he needed help and he didn't want to get help from Hannibal unless he absolutely needed to. At the time, he hadn't exactly trusted Hannibal, but he hadn't been quite sure why.

There was a picture on the mantle in the living room over the cold fireplace. Alana with a man. They stood close, though Will knew they weren't together. There was love there, but not a romantic love.

And then Alana had come home and brought all of Will's pack with her. And then tried to get Will caught by sending a signal to officer's watching her home with her car fob. Will had left then and returned to Hannibal, the only person crazy enough to give him what he needed and wanted.

"There was a picture of him," Will whispered. "In Alana's house. She was with him. I knew she had a brother. They look similar."

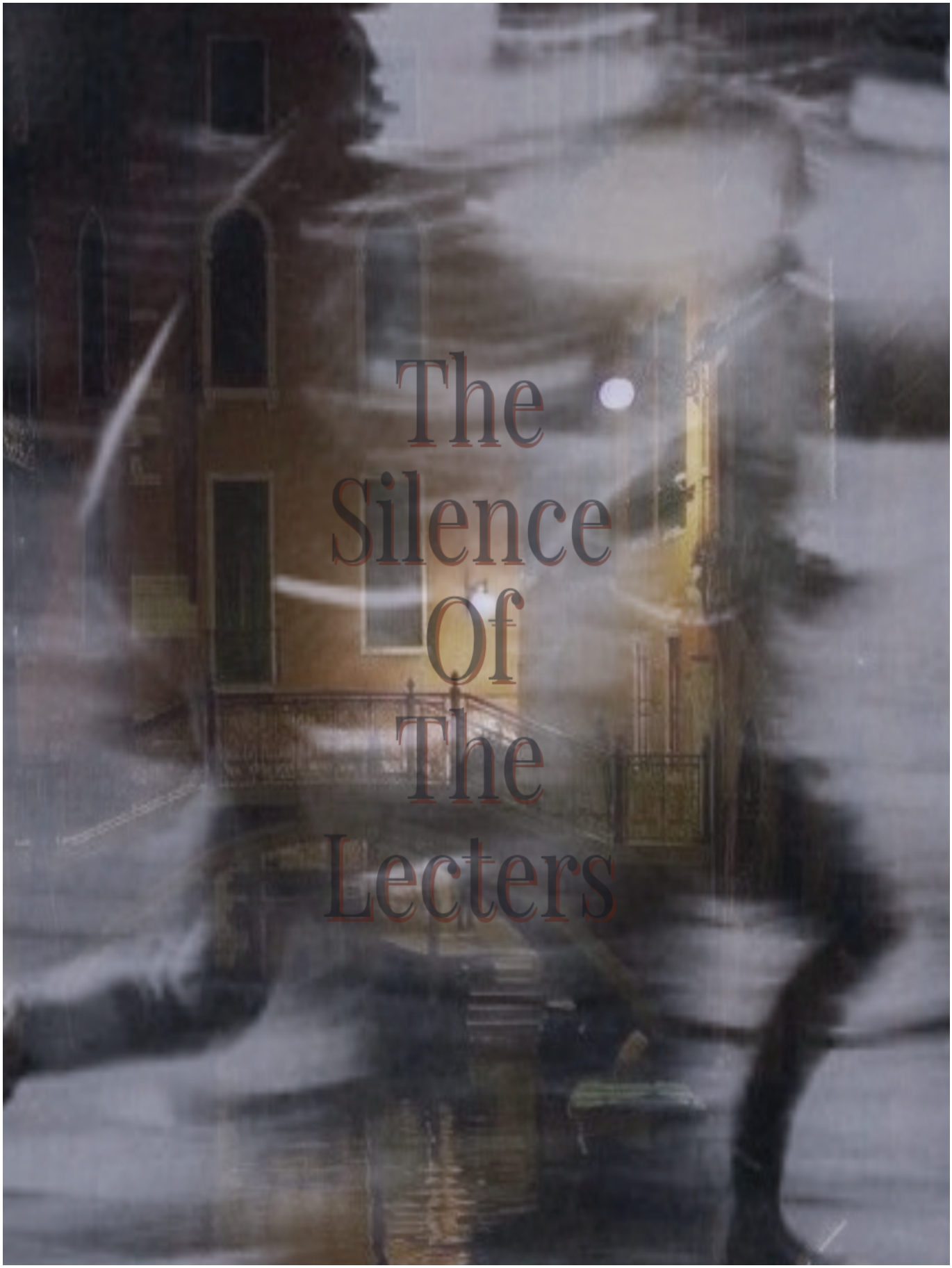
"Revenge?" Hannibal asked curiously at the new information given to him.

"I..." Will licked his lips and turned his head to the side, watching as they man lifted a phone up, most likely taking pictures of their villa. Though, Will wasn't sure why he would need pictures if he had been following the boys around for as long as Morgan claimed he had. "I'm not sure."

# Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

"Stay away from my family."
"I've just come to collect what's mine."
"Yours?"


The
Silence
Of
The
Lecters

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“Wally, they said to stay here,” Morgan called as Walter left their parent’s room.

“Shut up, kid,” Walter hissed, heading towards Morgan’s now vacant room where he could see out of the window. When he was younger, he probably would have been more afraid of looking out of that window at Hannibal working, but now it held a spark of interest for him, and he hoped that his mother wouldn’t judge him too harshly for it.

“Wally.”

“I said shut up.” Walter turned back as Morgan stuck his head around the door frame. “You’re not allowed to look.”

“But you’re looking!”

“Shut up and go back to their room.”

Morgan frowned and stuck his tongue out at Walter who returned the childish action before looking back out of the window. He could hear Morgan’s retreating footsteps and then the house fell silent. Walter’s gaze was intently on the man in the boat and Walter held his breath as the man stood up, his attention on something or someone else.

Had that really been the best approach? Something so direct as speaking with the man? Walter wished he could have had more of an input because he would have had them pack up and the moment the man’s boat had left in the morning, left, and went to another of their safe houses. Maybe not even that. Maybe have he and Morgan leave on their normal Saturday shopping and then they could all rendezvous with Will and Hannibal at the mooring and leave on the sailboat.

Walter took another step closer to find Hannibal just barely in view, but Walter didn’t dare move any nearer just in case he was seen. What interested him was the fact that he didn’t see Will anywhere. It was possible that his dad was just out of sight and there, but Walter tried his best to ignore it and focus on reading lips instead as they were too far away for Walter to actually make anything out.

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“I would rather appreciate it if you didn’t loiter around my home,” Hannibal stated, causing the man in the small boat to jump and get to his feet. “You’re giving my youngest quite a fright.”

“Your youngest?” the man asked back in English, not a single hint of any accent to his words other than American. Interesting to be sure, but it only gave Will’s theory more of a foundation. His distinct features only strengthened it further.

“That is the window you keep staring into and taking pictures of,” Hannibal agreed with a nod, coming to a stop just beside the boat and looking down on the man who was a bit shorter due to the bobbing water level. “I would suggest that you pack up, leave and never return before I call the *polizia*.”

The man gave a small laugh and shook his head. “You wouldn’t do that.”

“I wouldn’t?” Hannibal challenged, taking in more details of the boat only to find it empty save for the man. “Would you care to find out?”

“Doctor Hannibal Lecter would not risk calling the police.”

Hannibal’s brows rose at the words, but he didn’t grace them with any answer that would confirm or deny the accusation. “If I find out that you are stalking my son from any time after this point, I will take legal measures to make sure that you are unable to come near my child.”

“But he’s not yours, is he?” the man challenged with a smirk. “And since when have you ever done anything legally?”

“I’m really trying to be quite nice about this,” Hannibal tried once more with a small sigh, adding a bit more innocent annoyance to his tone. “Stay away from my family.”

“I’ve just come to collect what’s mine.”

“Yours?” Hannibal turned at the new voice and Will stepped a bit closer from where he had been hiding in the shadows of the villa, listening. He hadn’t expected Will to join the conversation. Will normally enjoyed spectating over engaging, but every once in a while, Will would dabble. “Nothing here belongs to you and my husband is much kinder than I will be. It is time for you to fuck off. If you come near this place or my children again, I will take care of you myself.”

“Like you took care of my sister?” he challenged.

Hannibal smirked lightly. He hadn’t doubted Will for a moment, but it still always made a feeling of pride swell in him when he saw Will working. This was Alana’s brother. Hannibal had heard about a supposed brother, but Alana had never mentioned him by name. Just that she had a twin, and they weren’t on the best of terms and that was that. Maybe Will knew more about the man than Hannibal did, but he doubted it.

“Sister?” Hannibal questioned.

“Stop playing dumb with me. I know you two killed my sister in cold blood and took her son. That’s why I am here.” His eyes shone darkly, and his tone had lost all of its lightness. “You shot Alana and her wife down and stole Morgan. I’ve been tracking you down since then.”

“I think you’ve got it wrong,” Will informed, though there was no way that the man would believe him. “Neither of us touched Alana.”

“Liar!” The shout echoed around the night, bouncing off the stone buildings and down the canals. His hands had become fists at his sides and his jaw was tight. “Both of you are fucking cowards. Give me my nephew back.”

“You’re not taking our son,” Hannibal stated strongly.

“I’m willing to make this as easy as possible,” he pushed. “I take Morgan back and you never hear from us again. Your whereabouts will be kept quiet and there doesn’t have to be a fight between us.”

“It will be a slaughter, not a fight Alan,” Will explained simply. “You will not come out on top.”

“So, you won’t just hand him over?” There wasn’t any surprise in Alan’s voice. Simply disappointment as if he really had been hoping it could be that simple.

Will snorted and Hannibal reached out a hand to stop Will's step closer to the boat. "Why would we just *hand him over?*" Will shot back sharply, tongue forked. "He's our son and we have asked nicely and threatened. It is time for you to go."

"I can't do that," Alan insisted with a shake of his head. "Not now that I know he's alive. He belongs with family. He belongs with my wife, my children and me. He will be well looked after and-"

"He has a family and doesn't belong to you."

"We will not ask again for your departure," Hannibal continued on for Will who was seething at his side. Hannibal's hand kept Will at bay like a leash on an attack dog.

"I'll be back and he will be coming with me. There won't be another option," Alan warned, leaning over to start up the engine of his small boat, it coming to life with a soft purring.

"I do not take kindly to you threatening my family," Hannibal stated firmly, taking a step back. "You will not like what is waiting for you if you choose to return."

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"We need to leave," Walter whispered over to Morgan. "You need to pack."

"We're leaving?" Morgan asked back in disbelief. "But-But-"

"We need to pack," Walter pushed in a harsh softness. "We're not safe."

"But he left."

"It doesn't matter."

Walter moved from where he had been positioned at the window where a boat had disappeared and where his parents had disappeared from. He went to Morgan's closet and opened the door, reaching up to the top shelf to pull out a backpack. Morgan rushed over to his side with a pout.

"I don't want to-"

"It doesn't matter what you want." Walter ripped open the backpack and began shoving some clothes into it from Morgan's closet. "Grab your bunny. Come on." When Morgan didn't move, Walter gave a sigh and shook his head. "Why can't you ever just listen to me, huh? Go get some things. You can't take them all."

There was a small shift from Morgan, taking a small step backwards, Walter's shirt slipping further off of the child's shoulder. Ever since Walter had let him borrow his shirt nearly a year ago, he had never been given it back. It had become Morgan's new pajamas. Morgan's lip was once more between his teeth, being chewed on and Walter reached out, taking a firm grip on Morgan's shoulder and kneeling down.

"Listen to me, Einstein," he whispered over the sound of the front door opening and closing down stairs. "We can't stay here anymore. It's not safe, ok? I know you don't want to leave. I don't want to leave either, but this is our life." There was something that twisted inside of Walter at the admittance of the words and how grossly true they were. They had all grown too comfortable here. It was time to move on. "You trust me, don't you?"

Morgan gave a small nod, arms circling around his body. “Of course, Wally.”

“Then trust that I will keep you safe. I will protect you.” Walter’s fingers ran through Morgan’s hair and he leaned over pressing a kiss to Morgan’s forehead. “Go grab your bunny and a pillow and blanket. It’s time that we move on. Start a new life. I’ll be there with you just like always. Come on.”

“Ok.” Morgan pulled out of Walter’s grip and raced from the room, past Hannibal and Will who had reached the top of the stairs, disappearing into Walter’s room.

Walter glanced up from the bag he was packing for Morgan and got to his feet as his parents looked into the room. “We’ll be ready soon. Just a few more minutes,” Walter explained.

“You heard then?” Hannibal asked with a small smile.

Walter shook his head. “No. But I know you two well enough to know that this is what you’d want us to do.” Walter went back to shoving things into the bag, but stopped at the silence from the doorway, no praise or disagreement coming at his words. He looked back over his shoulder with a curious brow, doing his best to read his dad. Hannibal was out of the question. He couldn’t use his barely functional empathy to know instantly what Hannibal were thinking, but Will was a bit easier. “Who was that?” Walter asked after a breath. “He’s important. Who is he?”

“Alana’s brother,” Will supplied with a deep breath.

Walter turned fully around with confusion written across his face. “Morgan’s uncle?”

“The very same.” Hannibal gave a nod. “He will be returning. The quicker you can be ready, the better that would be for all of us. I’ve told you that it is better to have a pack ready to go.”

“I think we all just loved this place too much to actually think we’d have to leave,” Walter muttered with a sad sort of smile. “I’ll miss it.”

“Maybe we’ll come back in the future,” Hannibal offered in faux hope. “For now, pack. We’ll leave the moment you’re done.”

“Yes, Sir.” Walter nodded and went back to work.

“Will, go grab our things. I need to make some final adjustments.”

“Alright.” Will patted Hannibal's shoulder and passed the doorway, heading up towards their own room, the sound of the door closing indicating that Will was out of hearing range.

“Do not breathe a word of this to Morgan,” Hannibal was swift to instruct. “We will discuss it with him when the time is right. Do I make myself clear?”

“Perfectly.” Walter assured.

“Speed is of the essence. We can replace things, but not you or your brother.” With those words, Hannibal turned away from the room, leaving Walter to grumble his argument of:

“We aren’t brothers.”

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Morgan stopped in the doorway of Walter's room at the words that had been hurriedly spoken by his parents to Walter in the other room. Uncle? Had he had an uncle? His mind scrambled to try to latch onto such a person, but when he thought of that house all he could see was blood. Even through happy memories, it was blurred and stained with red.

Maybe that had been one of the men who had been fighting with his mother one day. Asking why she had disappeared and separated from her family and she had yelled at the man to get out. That he wasn't welcomed. He looked similar to his mother. Or he thought the man did. All images of his mothers were deteriorated at this point, what Hannibal had called a possible coping mechanism with having watched them both be taken right in front of him.

Morgan hid back further into the room, waiting for his parents to be done speaking to Walter. His bunny was clutched tightly to his chest. Even if he didn't need to sleep with the bunny anymore, it still brought him an insane amount of comfort just like it had the night that Will had given it to him. He waited until the voices died and the bedroom door further down the hall opened and closed twice before returning to the bedroom that Walter was working in.

"He wants me, doesn't he?" Morgan asked as he grabbed a pillow from his bed and began to roll up a blanket to shove into the pillow case.

"You heard." It wasn't a question. A statement. Walter tossed the backpack onto the bed next to Morgan and Morgan began shoving his bunny into the sock cords on the bag. "Yes. He wants you. Does that frighten you?"

"No." Morgan threw the bag over his shoulder and grabbed onto his bulging pillow case, holding it against his body. "I didn't know I had an uncle. This is my family so..." Morgan fell quiet as Walter finally met his gaze from the pair of shoes he had gathered up for Morgan to put on. "Family is who takes care of you, not just blood, right?" Morgan's tone was hesitant as if afraid that he had said something wrong. "So you and Will and Hannibal are my family."

"You don't want to know your uncle?"

"I'm not too horribly curious," Morgan admitted, letting Walter help him put on his socks and shoes, even if he knew how to do it himself. He lifted one foot at a time and rested them on Walter's knee like he used to do when they were so much younger. "It's been years and now he suddenly shows up."

"We do hide."

"We couldn't be that hard to find." Morgan stumbled a bit and Walter's hands snatched out to steady the boy. "We all have habits that we can't break. I'm sure anyone could figure out where we were just based on how much money Hannibal and Will like to spend on things."

"They aren't subtle," Walter agreed, getting to his feet. "I need to pack. Be back in a moment."

"Wally-" Morgan broke off at a noise down the stairs that he almost thought he had imagined, but Walter must have heard it too.

Walter halted, a hand out to have Morgan be still. He raised an index finger to his lips to keep Morgan silent and stepped towards the doorway. The sound had been quiet enough that anyone else probably would have ignored it, but Walter knew the sound of a lock being picked anywhere.

Endless hours had been spent learning the exact same things. He knew the sound of a wrench being jiggled about in the lock waiting for all of the pins to align.

“Go get Dad and Father,” Walter instructed. “I’ll take care of this.”

“Wally.” Morgan’s hands took Walter’s wrist and Walter brushed Morgan’s hand off easily.

“Trust me. Go get Dad and Father.”

Morgan’s footsteps padded through the house and Walter made his way down the staircase, keeping to the outside of the steps just as Will had told him so long ago. Silence was key. Walter hit the bottom of the stairs and looked at the front door for a moment. The windows’ curtains were closed, but he could still see movement beyond them. There was more than one.

The door continued to click without success and Walter had to wonder if maybe the man was a new hand at picking locks or if he were missing the tension wrench which was undoubtedly the most important tool of the two to have. Whatever the reason, it gave Walter enough time to sneak into the kitchen and pick out a decent sized steak knife from the knife block. He angled his body at the door to be out of the way of the window, knife tight in hand and ready if he needed it.

Movement caught his eye and he glanced up at three people on the stairs. Hannibal followed Walter’s lead and fetched a knife from the kitchen, whereas Will checked his gun to make sure it was loaded before putting it back in its holster on his hip. Guns were for emergencies. No noise, no trace.

Will then took Morgan’s hand and guided Morgan towards the music room where Morgan could hide behind the couch. Will made his way into the kitchen where Hannibal waited and where a good portion of windows were. Windows that had all been cracked open wide enough for a person to enter through and that had left curtains blowing in the air.

The clicking at the door stilled until there was one final loud and echoing cick of the lock being turned. Walter’s eyes stayed trained on the door handle as it turned. The door swung inward and the warm breeze from the night rolled into the house. Walter stayed still, listening to the person straighten themselves upright and put away their tools before taking a step inside of the house.

The boot was heavy and the leg attached to it was clad in dark and thick fabric. Walter held his breath, listening to the way his heart beat in his chest. It was easier to take care of bodies if they were inside of the house. The blood could be scrubbed away from tile rather than pressure washed off of concrete. He had to wait. Wait for the right moment to strike.

As soon as the entirety of the person came into view, Walter’s arm shot out, taking the man’s shoulder and the other driving the knife as far into the man’s chest as he could. The movement wasn’t as smooth as Walter would have liked, his knife jolting in his hand as it hit a metal barrier. It broke through easily enough, but the man had Walter on the ground in a moment in a tackle, straddling Walter’s hips.

The knife was pulled from his ballistics vest came down over Walter who immediately put his arms up to block the onslaught. The cut was bright in the tear from the serrated edge. Walter threw his knee into the back of the man, knocking him off balance enough that Walter was able to pin the man to the floor. With slick hands, Walter snatched up the man’s wrist and slammed it against the floor until the knife was knocked away before grappling for the blade.

In one fluid motion, Walter put the knife to the man's throat and pulled. It was messy, but it was quick and efficient. Even if it covered him in more liquid red, the job was done and he could focus on the rest of the house where more commotion was.

Walter's eyes turned to the kitchen where a man lay across the counter, his neck at an odd angle over the edge of it. Will was busy with someone on the staircase and Hannibal had his hands full with someone who looked like he had a rope now tied tight around his throat.

"Wally!" Morgan's voice called from the music room. Walter jumped to his feet and rushed into the room where Morgan was being hoisted up and over a man's shoulder. Morgan was kicking furiously, hands pulling at the man's hair for dear life. The man hissed, swatting at Morgan.

"You fucking brat! Stop that!"

Morgan's nails clawed at the man's face. "Wally!"

Blood trickled into the man's eyes from the scrape and he was unable to see the teen approaching. With one well placed punch to the gut, the man doubled over, dropping Morgan to the floor. Walter pulled Morgan to his feet and shoved Morgan out of the way before he stepped towards the man who had such striking similarities to Morgan even though his face was now mangled.

Icy blue eyes glared up at him and the man gasped, trying to catch his breath from the blow he received, but Walter didn't give him the chance. With another drive of his fist, Walter knocked the man to the floor, climbing over the top of him to find the same man who had been in the boat outside of Morgan's window earlier. His uncle.

Walter pushed the idea that he was killing something special to Morgan aside. There were two sides coming at him and both had the same weapons. One was lying and one was telling the truth and he had to pick a side. This was about preservation. This was about keeping Morgan safe. This was about keeping the only solid family he had ever known together. And that was the side he had picked and maybe the way his blood soaked fingers locked around the man's throat only reinforced the idea that he was a villain, but he couldn't stop.

The lines had become far too blurred and faded and he just had to push them aside. Force himself to keep the pressure on this man's neck. He had to ignore the nails that were coming for his eyes, that left matching gashes down his cheeks.

The man squirmed and kicked under Walter and Walter couldn't help but beg aloud. "Stop moving. Please stop moving." He added more pressure, wishing for the man's weakness to finally set in. He hated it. Fuck, he hated all of it. Hated the way that he could feel the man trying to breath and swallow under his palms. He hated how long it actually took to end someone this way. "Stop fucking moving."

Walter's eyes closed tightly and he held back the way his chest ached. A knife might have been personal, but this was so much worse. This was intimate. Eyes meeting eyes, fingers feeling the pulse fluttering to a final stop. But he couldn't stop. He couldn't release the pressure. Not until the clock ticked down. Anything less than five minutes and the man could come back. But those five minutes had to have been worse than any hell.

"Let me go!" a voice yelled and Walter had to resurface from his mind, the action groggy. He looked over his shoulder to where another man was grabbing at Morgan and dragging him from the room. Walter tried to get up, but a sharp pain to the back of his head knocked him to the ground.

“Let go!” Morgan shouted, hands scrambling to grab onto anything that he could as he was once more thrown over someone’s shoulder. The curtains he snatched up held firm in his hands, despite the blood that Walter had passed to them, until with a tug the rod came free from the wall and clattered to the ground. “No!”

He grabbed up fistfuls of the fabric of the man’s shirt and tried to pull at it, but either the angle wasn’t right or the man was stronger than Walter had been, because the man just continued his steady stride to the front door. Why was he so small? Why was he so tiny and young and weak? He couldn’t even bring down Walter, what made him think that he could ever bring down a fully grown man?

“Hannibal! Will!” he called as the man stepped out into the night. He hoped that one of them had heard. Surely Walter had. Walter would come for him if none of the rest of them did.

There hadn’t been any immediate panic until Morgan was lowered into a boat in the canal. His body froze as the boat rocked side to side and he did his best to try not to make the rocking worse as the man climbed in beside him. He wanted to scream, but the noise died in his throat. His muscles ached with how tightly they had clenched up and he was internally wondering why he had never learned how to swim, why he couldn’t force himself to be more like Walter.

In a swift movement and the blur of something solid, the man was knocked from the boat and a splash seemed to bounce around Morgan’s head. His heart lurched up into this throat as the boat rocked as if on a mighty sea and he was flung into the water.

He knew that what he needed to do was hold his breath and kick and he would find the surface, but his body didn’t listen. It never did when it came to water. Instead, he opened his mouth, bubbles escaping as he let out a breath and sucked in nothing but a breath full of liquid. It burned, his chest wanting to explode with the pressure and the immediate image of his mothers flashed before his eyes.

He swore he could nearly make out the features of their faces before a strength wrapped around him and tugged him away from the faces that floated dreamily in that canal. The shock of the air sent a chill through Morgan as he was pulled from the canal and laid down on the sidewalk.

There were two faces over the top of him and some sort of pressure around his chest, but the distance was what caught his attention, fuzzy and drifting. Two men struggling in the water, forcing one another under the surface only to pop up once more. One that Morgan recognized but couldn’t quite place.

Will continued his frantic wrestling in the canal, the man on top of him forcing him under the water, fingers around his throat, thumbs pressing deep into his windpipe. Bubbles exploded from Will’s mouth as he fought desperately to wrench the hands from his throat, but the man’s strength was wild and his was failing. He wasn’t going to make it. He was going to drown and he would never know what happened to his family. If they were safe or injured.

Will’s hands snatched at the man’s thumbs and pried them from his throat. The thumbs were the weakest on the body. If he could just manage to get enough leverage then he would be free. With as much strength as he could find he snapped them. Left and right, snap, snap. Both broken.

Will was let go with a muffled scream. Will surfaced, gasping with arms flailing to try to steady himself. He had always considered himself a strong swimmer, but the ocean was far more forgiving than a person.

Then Will was back on top. He drove the man's head into the side of the fiberglass boat. Felt a crunch from the man's nose. He did it again. Another crunch and blood spurted into the water. He hit him again until the man was barely keeping himself afloat. Will forced the man's head under the water. He kicked, struggled, slipped from Will and surfaced.

Will was swift to snatch up his head once more and shove him below, both hands used to keep the man under. Bubbles streamed up to the surface and the man's arms and legs thrashed, but a bit slower now.

The struggles began to diminish. The stream of bubbles lessened. Will held him under a bit longer. As if in a final attempt to save himself, the man's arm burst from the water, fingers clawing at the summer air that seemed so much colder now. Then the arm went limp and flopped down with a splash.

Will felt the tension leave the man and the water calmed around them to the point where Will could see the man beneath the water, mouth open. A single bubble rolled out. It rose slowly and popped. Then another bubble, this one smaller. Then none at all. His face was relaxed. His arms were splayed out to his sides, floating loose in the water.

Will let him go and watched the body slip into the shadows. The body was certain to resurface, but at the moment Will didn't care. All he wanted to do was let the ache settle into his body and finally rest, but now wasn't the time. Especially not now that he could hear loud coughing and vomiting.

Will swam to the side of the canal, hoisted himself out of the water, stumbled over to a just as soaked Walter and Morgan and a dry Hannibal who was clutching Morgan tightly against his chest as the boy sobbed.

Will could see it now. His rash action forced Morgan into the water and Walter jumped in after the boy. He shoved the guilt down and let out a deep breath. He pushed his dripping curls from his eyes and licked his lips.

"We need to go. We can't stay here," he said, speaking the words that everyone knew into the night. "We don't have time to wait around." Walter nodded and forced himself to his feet, stumbled slightly and clutched a bleeding arm to his sopping wet shirt that was becoming a watery crimson color. Will's hand took the boy's shoulder. "Proud of you."

"Later," Walter said, breathing hard as his pain began to finally settle in. He walked back over to the house and disappeared inside for a moment, leaving Will to look over his mess.

"Will he be ok?" he asked as Hannibal got to his feet, still holding Morgan against him.

"We'll have to watch him tonight, make sure he doesn't have any issues, but I think he'll be ok," Hannibal explained. The sound of a boat engine caused both men to freeze and listen. There were no sirens. They might have been loud, but he didn't think that they had been loud enough to have the police called on them.

Walter rushed back out of the house with something floppy in his hand and he nodded in the direction of their planned route of escape. "Let's get the hell out of here," he said strongly, causing his parents to nod in agreement and start down the walk.

The boat engine grew closer, louder and the moment the dark shape rounded a corner coming towards them, a gunshot rang out through the night followed by the clipping of bullet to stone. The

four ducked into an alley, the gunfire following them. It didn't take long for rushed footsteps to chase after them as well.

"Go," Walter instructed from the back of the group.

"What?" Will demanded, glancing over his shoulder towards the teen whose voice was far more determined than he liked.

"Someone needs to hold them off or they will keep following us. You go and keep Morgan safe."

"No." Will came to a halt and turned back to Walter, checking the alley first to make certain they still had ample time to run. "We aren't splitting up."

"Will you get Morgan somewhere safe before we all get caught?" Walter argued.

"They boy's right," Hannibal agreed. "They'll keep following us like when we left Germany."

"I am not leaving-"

"I'll be fine," Walter assured with a cocky side grin. "Remember who raised me, Dad."

"Wally," a voice croaked as the footfall gained. Walter stepped over to where Morgan was held and pressed his bunny into the boy's hand. "You said that you would come with us."

"Take care of yourself Einstein." Walter took a few large steps back, shoes sloshing with excess water still trapped in them. "Get out of here, will ya?"

Before Will could argue, Hannibal's hand snatched out and took his wrist, holding him in place as he watched his oldest disappear back around a corner and into a hail of gunfire. Will's want to run towards the noise was overpowered by a drag of his wrist, Hannibal still far stronger than Will could ever hope to be.

A body far larger than Walter's turned the corner and the three of them broke into a run once more. Will's clothes hung on him, dripping water and feeling heavier the further they went with another set of footfalls trailing behind them.

"Left!" Will called out and Hannibal obeyed the order, Will catching the side of the building to make the sharp turn, before coming to a stop to face whoever it was that had chased after them. He knew this alley. He knew these streets. He knew exactly where construction on an older house falling into the canals was and it wouldn't take long for the hunter to know that too.

The moment the figure rounded the corner, Will reached out, grabbing the man's arm and tugged. The man's momentum shot him in the exact direction that Will picked and with a sickening sound of meat being speared, it was over. The footsteps had stopped as had the gunfire and all that was left was a man impaled on some exposed rebar.

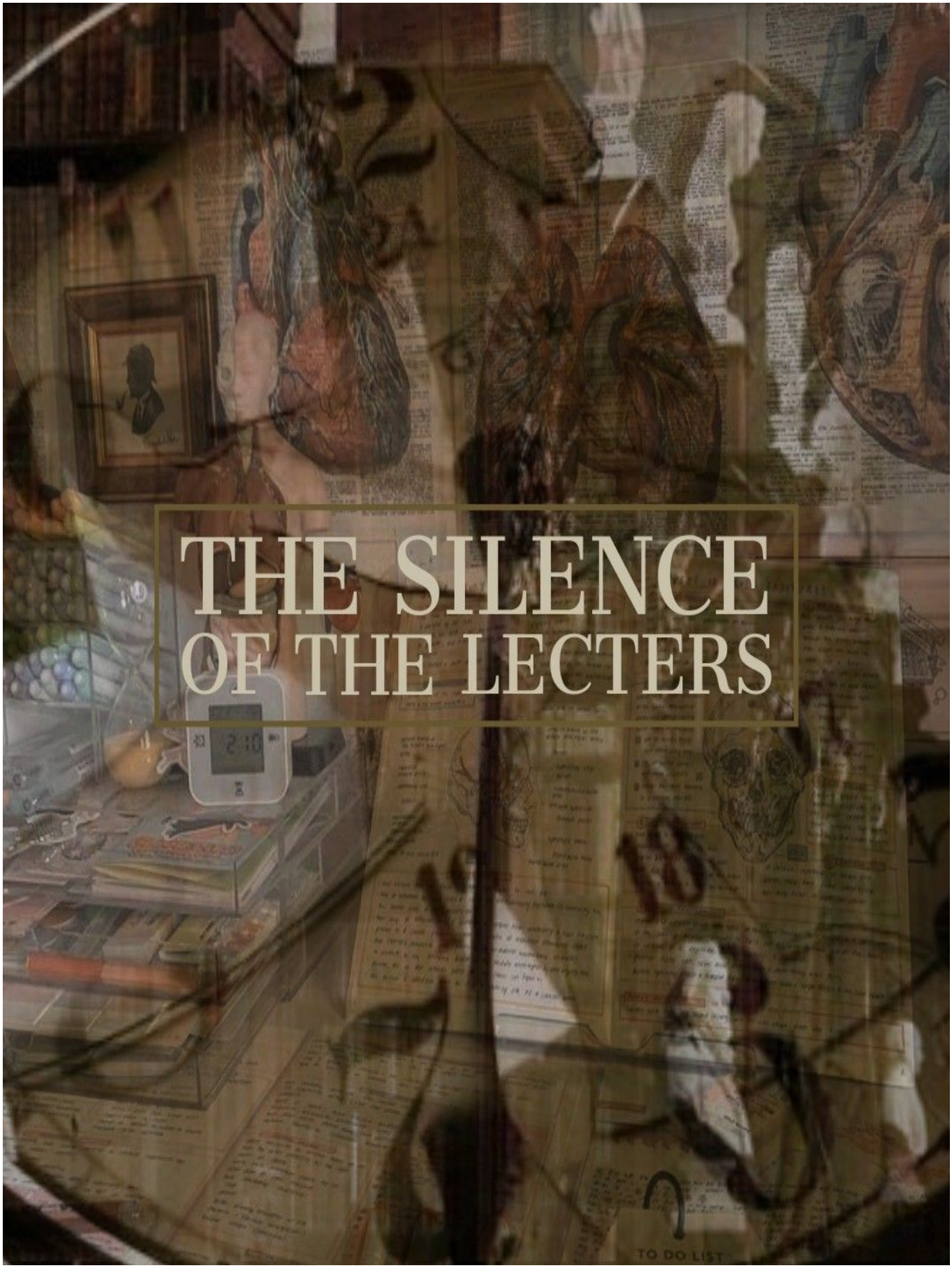
His sounds of agony were sharp behind teeth, but even if he did manage to get himself off of his mount, Will doubted he would make it much further. Will took a step back, watching as the man's hands tried to grip the bar and push himself up only for his body to fall back down.

"Love, come along. We have several more hours to go," Hannibal beckoned. Will nodded and turned, following Hannibal through the winding passages of Venice.

# Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

After dinner wine was nowhere near as lovely as it once had been, and Will and Hannibal sat in silence on the floor in the living room. Morgan had finally fallen asleep, head in Hannibal's lap and arms wrapped around his bunny. Hannibal still read softly from a book and Will stared at the wall opposite them where a fireplace sat, unlit due to the warmth of the evening. It wouldn't be lit for a few more months at least and Will found himself suddenly missing a faraway cabin in the middle of New York.


THE SILENCE
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“It’s time to sleep,” Hannibal hushed for the umpteenth time, but it did nothing to stop Morgan’s outburst. The boy clutched tightly to his rabbit while Will clutched tightly to the boy, rocking him and brushing fingers through his hair.

“It’s ok,” Will whispered in a kind voice. “Tomorrow we can go look at the Gothenburg Museum. Wouldn’t that be fun?” Morgan shook his head against Will’s chest, the tears still falling like they had been the moment they had entered their new home that had been cold and dusty. “What would you like to do?”

“I want Wally.”

“He’ll contact us when time permits,” Hannibal interrupted with a small dismissing wave of his hand from where he sat in a chair beside Morgan’s new bed. “For now, there is no point in-”

“Hannibal,” Will warned softly, meeting his husband’s eyes. The silent conversation that fell between them was one that they often had. Will was too soft, and Hannibal was too harsh. Will was far too protective, and Hannibal could show a bit more support. “You’re not making this any easier.”

“Stop babying the boy,” Hannibal threw out, obviously just as on edge as the rest of them and the emotions showing themselves through twinged anger. “He’s not a child. I told you that they shouldn’t have stayed together as much as they did. They can’t live apart.”

“Morgan is more than capable in handling himself,” Will defended coldly. “Just because we’ve become dependent doesn’t mean he has. Morgan is allowed to miss a person just like the two of us.”

“He can miss Walter, but this is ridiculous. He’s been crying for-”

“He’s not a robot, Hannibal!” Will shouted, causing Morgan to jump at the outburst, more shocked at the fact that Will was yelling at Hannibal than anything else. They didn’t yell. Fight, sure, but they never yelled at one another. Morgan’s heart beat wildly as he silently listened to the conversation around him. “He is not some little emotionless toy! He is a person, Hannibal. He has feelings just like you, though sometimes I question that.”

Morgan wasn’t sure what he expected the outcome of the outburst to be, but Hannibal’s sudden silence wasn’t it. Hannibal slumped in his chair and a hand covered his mouth, leaving Morgan curious if his father were pouting. After a decent amount of time that ticked on for what felt like years, Hannibal got to his feet and excused himself from the room.

“Dad?”

“Shh,” Will hushed. “It’s going to be ok. You can cry. Just try to sleep.”

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Morgan didn’t sleep that night. None of the three of them found any sort of comfort. The house, despite the way that it had finally started to warm up with the early morning sun and the smell of fresh coffee being made, did nothing to stop the way that there felt like there was a tear in the family. A very person sized hole that might never be filled again.

It was also one of the first times that Will had seen Hannibal cling to his cell phone for dear life. It was constantly in hand, ready to be answered at a moment's notice. He wouldn't wait until a Thursday evening to listen to incoming voicemails. The call that came in would be answered instantly, but until that point, the house stayed in a tense silence.

*"Quand le mystère est trop impressionnant, on n'ose pas désobéir,*" (When the mystery is too impressive, we dare not disobey,) Will read softly to Morgan. Morgan sat curled up against Will's side on the couch, looking over the book in Will's hands without much acknowledgement, but at least the house wasn't quiet. At least he could focus on something else other than what had happened. Will glanced down at Morgan who leaned his head into Will's shoulder with a deep breath. His eyes then flickered up to Hannibal who had been pacing the living room for the last good thirty minutes that Will had been reading to Morgan for. *"Aussi absurde que cela me semblât à mille milles de tous les endroits habités et en danger de mort, je sortis de ma poche une feuille de papier et un stylographe.*" (As absurd as it seemed to me, a thousand miles from all inhabited and life-threatening places, I took out of my pocket a sheet of paper and a pen.)

There was a small whimper from Morgan and Will once more paused in his reading to look at the child who had pulled his bottom lip between his teeth and was chewing on it unconsciously while his hands rang the bunny's ears.

"Don't do that, Morgan," Will instructed in a kind voice, a hand reaching out to tap Morgan's chin. "We don't want your lip to bleed."

"Sorry," Morgan whispered.

"That's ok. Let's just work on noticing if you start to do that. We want to break that habit, right?"

"Right." Morgan gave a sigh. "Can we just call him? Why do we have to wait and-"

"We don't know if he's in a safe place," Will explained, eyes returning to the pacing Hannibal was going to start making Will dizzy if the man continued to make skid marks in the floor. "It's better if he calls us. Safer."

"What if he doesn't call?"

"I'll head back at the end of the week if we don't hear from him," Hannibal offered in answer, though it was distracted. "For now, patience would be a virtue, Morgan."

"Hannibal." Will's voice ached with irritation, and he let out a deep and pained sigh. "Maybe take some of your own advice?"

"Please don't fight," Morgan begged out in a voice so quiet that Will barely heard it. "I don't like it when you fight."

"We are not fighting," Hannibal stated, his movement finally coming to a halt. He turned to face the couch and stepped closer, kneeling beside Morgan and taking Morgan's hand. Their eyes met and Hannibal let the guilt of his harshness finally fill his body and he pursed his lips as he let himself see himself fully. "I'm sorry I've been so harsh with you. Your dad and I are... terrified that we've somehow lost your brother. We just want him to be safe and with us again. That's what you want too, isn't it?" Morgan nodded, hand tightening its grip on Hannibal's. "Emotions are high because we're scared."

“You don’t get scared,” Morgan argued out, looking between both Will and Hannibal with creased brows. “You’re you. You don’t get scared.”

“Even we get scared Morgan.” Will’s hand brushed through Morgan’s hair, and he gave Morgan a small smile. “When it comes to you and Walter, we will always be afraid of you getting hurt. We love you both deeply and this isn’t a family without the four of us.”

“It wasn’t right for me to take that out on you. Do you forgive me Morgan?”

“Of course, Father,” Morgan replied. “Can we do something, so we don’t have to think about being scared?”

“Like what?”

“Make dinner? I’m hungry.”

There was a small chuckle from both Will and Hannibal and Hannibal nodded. “That sounds like a good idea. Would you like to go into town and look at the markets with me?”

“Yes please!” Morgan jumped to his feet. “Let me get my shoes.”

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The next day went by just as slowly and just as eggshell filled as the day before had, though Hannibal was able to stay far more conscious about the words that came out of his mouth. Will had been right, just as he always was, and Hannibal needed to keep himself put together far better. He couldn’t let himself slip in the comfort that had surrounded him.

He hadn’t realized just how badly letting people into his heart would tear him to pieces and instead of slowly adding one person at a time he had shoved three into such a small space that it had become a hopeless act to not come to love each of them as his own. That in turn had only proven to him how much he had to lose and how he couldn’t afford to.

After dinner wine was nowhere near as lovely as it once had been, and Will and Hannibal sat in silence on the floor in the living room. Morgan had finally fallen asleep, head in Hannibal’s lap and arms wrapped around his bunny. Hannibal still read softly from a book and Will stared at the wall opposite them where a fireplace sat, unlit due to the warmth of the evening. It wouldn’t be lit for a few more months at least and Will found himself suddenly missing a faraway cabin in the middle of New York.

A ringing seemed to make the entire world stop. Hannibal’s words fell still, and Will sat up a little more sharing looks with Hannibal before Hannibal reached for the phone that had been silent for the last two days. He didn’t care what the number read or who it belonged to, he just had to answer it.

“Hello?” he asked quickly into the receiver, loud enough that Morgan stirred slightly.

“Oh, you’re alright.” There was a relieved breath on the other side of the line and Hannibal felt his chest loosen up at a familiar laugh. “All of you are alright?”

“Fine, fine,” Hannibal dismissed swiftly. “What about you? Where are you?”

“At the villa,” Walter replied. “It... took some time to get everything cleaned up. Well, as cleaned up as I could.”

“And you’re safe?” Hannibal pressed once more as if his son’s voice alone weren’t enough to prove the fact. Will had moved closer to hear the conversation a bit more, hand tight on Hannibal’s arm as he listened.

“Yeah. My arm’s killing me though. I think I broke it. I’ll go to the doctors later. I have some more things to take care of first.”

“What could possibly be more important than-”

“It’s summer and there’s a dozen-”

“Yes, yes,” Hannibal quickly interrupted, his free hand reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “Do not neglect your health, Walter.”

“I’ll be fine,” Walter assured. “I set it the best I could for the time. Question, where is the magic room when you need it?”

Hannibal looked over at Will who was listening intently, and Will frowned with knowing in his eyes. Hannibal gave a small sigh. “You mean you don’t know?” Hannibal asked.

“No idea. I’ve been looking everywhere. Kinda need a better place than closets. They’re going to start to smell soon.”

“In my study.” Hannibal reached down and petted over Morgan’s hair. Move the desk.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Will’s patience must have run out because he snatched the phone and put it to his ear. “When are you coming home?” he asked in such a quick string of words that they nearly all ran together. “We have your room-”

“I’m not.... I’m...” Walter gave a deep breath across the line and Will could hear the hesitancy in his tone. “I’m going to stay here.”

Normally the absolutely dumbfounded look across Will’s face would have caused Hannibal to smile or even laugh, but He couldn’t find it in himself at this exact moment. Not when it came to their son.

“What do you mean you’re going to stay?” Will demanded, anger missing and disbelief overtaking his words.

“I mean that my school and my friends are here and I-”

“You’re coming home.” The sentence was insistent, and Hannibal took Will’s hand, giving it a light and reassuring squeeze.

“Dad, come on. I’m not a kid anymore.”

“You’re not an adult either.”

“Dad!”

“Will, maybe we should discuss-”

“There’s nothing to discuss Hannibal,” Will interrupted, meeting Hannibal with teary blue eyes. “Walter Johnathan Graham, you are coming home-”

“My middle name doesn’t scare me, Dad.” Walter snorted out his laughter. “It’s me we’re talking about here. I’ll be fine. The last six years have been training me for this. I think I can handle buying groceries and doing homework alone.”

Will’s chest contorted into so many different shapes that he nearly wanted to throw up. He couldn’t remember the last time that he had been without his children for more than a night and these two days had been absolute torture.

“It’s not safe,” Will tried to reason once more, but it came out as a broken whisper.

“Nowhere is safe,” Walter shot back, smile all too present in his voice for Will’s liking.

“Please.”

The line grew silent as both parties took in Will’s plea. Hannibal pulled Will’s hand up to his mouth and pressed a kiss to it. “He will be fine,” he assured, but Will only shook his head.

“Dad, I can’t just... Follow you around my entire life. You know that I’ve never wanted any of this and this is my chance to do something for me, something that I want, something that will make me happy.” Walter took a deep inhale and Will closed his eyes, nodding as if Walter could see the motion. “I promise to work hard and I’m not going to disappoint you. I’ll be better than she ever was.”

Will frowned at the mention of Abigail. The pain of Hannibal’s snap had never really left Walter and Will cursed the way that Walter used Abigail against himself. Used her as some unmeasurable feat to reach when Walter had all but outgrown her in an instant. But it didn’t matter how many times Will tried to tell this to Walter, it never changed the damage that had been done.

“Walter-”

“I need to go. The police keep stopping by. I’ll talk to you guys later. Tell Morgan I said hi.”

Before Will had a chance to utter even a sound, the line went dead and he groaned, lowering the phone from his ear and tossing it to the floor beside Hannibal’s leg.

“I blame you,” Will grumbled, leaning back against Hannibal.

“Whatever for?”

“His stubbornness comes from you.”

Hannibal chuckled and shook his head. “I’m afraid you are mistaken, my love. His rebellious independence is influenced by you and you alone.”

“Let’s get Morgan into bed,” Will sighed. “We’ll tell him in the morning.”

“Hey kid,” Walter said with a bright smile across the video call only to look upon the teary face of Morgan. His smile dipped slightly. “Hey, what’s up? What’s going on?”

“They said you’re not coming home,” Morgan mumbled into the head of his bunny. “You said we’d be together again.”

“Kid,” Walter sighed and ran a hand through his hair, laying back on his mattress with the phone held over his face. “I know I said-”

“Lying is bad,” Morgan interrupted, pout present in his brows though Walter couldn’t see his lips. “Wally, you wouldn’t lie to me.”

“Of course. It wasn’t a lie when I said it. Things changed.”

“Unchange them. You can come home!”

Walter’s smile was soft, and his eyes flickered over the younger boy who had become so entangled in his life that it was as if half of him were missing. “I was actually able to get some sleep for once in my life, Einstein. You weren’t kicking me.” He was teasing and it wasn’t a lie. Not completely. He had been able to sleep, but it wasn’t restful. Having a whole bed to himself somehow felt so empty that he wasn’t sure what to do with it. “I miss you too,” he finally admitted. “But you’ll get on without me. I've told you that it’s time for you to grow up.”

“Wally, I-”

“Look. I’ll still come to visit, ok? Birthdays and some weekends and holidays. We can talk on the phone and write letters back and forth.”

“But Wally-”

“You’ll write me a letter, won’t you Einstein?”

“I-I guess so,” Morgan whispered, barely audible to Walter.

“Kid, I need to get some more work done. I’ll talk to you later, ok?” Morgan hid his face further into the bunny and Walter bit his bottom lip, tightness constricting his chest. “Hey, when I stop by to see you, you’ll be the first one to sign my cast. Just like always.”

“Really?”

“Really. Now get some rest Einstein. It’s late.”

“Bye Wally.”

“Bye kid.” Walter ended the call before Morgan could say anything else and he sighed, lowering his phone onto his chest. He rubbed at his eyes tiredly, body aching as he forced it from his bed and back towards Hannibal’s study where a trap door under a desk waited for him.

He stepped down the stairs, his tired legs making his feet clomp a bit more loudly on the wood than they needed to, but there was no one there to hear to see, so he supposed it didn’t matter.

With a flick of a light switch, Walter blinked as the dark room burst into light, reflecting off of chrome medical equipment. With a deep inhale, he stepped over to the work bench and grabbed a

pair of gloves, pulling the latex over his fingers that were already wrinkled with how much he had been sweating in his previous pair.

He pulled his earphones from his pocket and put them in his ears, turning his music up as loud as he could. He glanced over his swollen arm that was an angry red and gave another sigh. He just had to push through this and then he could get it set. He just had a few more to go and at the rate he was going, if he stayed up all night then he would be able to be done.

Walter picked up the bone saw that had been glistening red until he cleaned it. It was slow work, but it was quiet and with the phantom gunshots still echoing through the neighborhood, he had to keep it silent. Not that it was silent for him. Despite the music, he could still hear the way that the flesh sounded when he cut through it even if the sound came from the feeling alone. It radiated up his arms and to his head.

And just because cutting through frozen meat was easier, didn't mean that it wasn't difficult. He could feel the way the blade would catch momentarily on ice and the bone was an entirely different beast all together. The sound felt like trying to snap a tree branch that was just a little too thick to accomplish the task. It made his stomach churn, but it was just one of the many evils of the world that he had to take care of.

His arm ached, but not in sympathy as he tossed the extra limb aside to be dealt with later. His own broken bone screamed out in pain, but he bit his tongue to distract himself and moved to the leg.

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Morgan: 11

Walter: 18

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"Father," Morgan said as he played through the piece once more, stumbling over a few of the notes. Hannibal leaned over and pointed to the page and at the note that Morgan had missed. Morgan gave a nod and started once more. "I've been thinking?"

"Yes?" Hannibal questioned as he paced behind Morgan, watching Morgan's hands and the sheet music carefully.

"I want to be a doctor."

Will looked up from his book with a smile. He put the book aside and rose to his feet to step closer to the piano. He didn't like to interrupt his son's lessons, but he figured that in this moment it would be ok to broach the boundary he set.

There was a sense of relief that Will felt inside of himself at the idea of Morgan wanting to pursue such a noble career. At the moment, as far as Will could get out of Walter, Walter was busy working in a repair shop, saving up to pay for college where he was going to try for sports medicine. But Will was nearly certain that the only thing Walter wanted to do was play soccer. And that was a difficult task all its own, but it wasn't sustainable like Morgan's new direction would be. One injury and Walter would be done.

“That’s an interesting idea, *kleiner hase*,” Hannibal stated, a hand taking Morgan’s shoulder. “Why kind of a doctor?”

“ER surgeon,” Morgan replied carefully, watching the way that his parents traded glances.

“That’s great!” Will patted Morgan’s head and Morgan gave a light smile.

“Can you teach me Father?” Morgan had been ready with the question on his tongue for at least the last week. He knew Hannibal had been a doctor of some sort, though he still wasn’t exactly sure. Walter wouldn’t tell him, and he doubted that Will or Hannibal would want to discuss such a thing with him. They were still so protective over their pasts and Morgan was more than happy to allow them to be. “Or maybe find somewhere where I could-”

“You’re probably too young for a medical school,” Hannibal cut in swiftly, his face turning thoughtful. “But I am certain that your dad and I can figure something out. We just need to discuss some things before we move forward.”

“Really?” Morgan’s back straightened and a smile covered his face. “You’ll teach me?”

“We’ve taught you everything the two of us know already,” Will explained, hand still petting Morgan’s head. “It’s time for you to start learning more about something that you want to learn. I think this is a good direction for us to take, Morgan.”

“Let’s finish up your lesson and we’ll discuss this further.” Hannibal pointed back to the piano and Morgan nodded, returning his hands to the keys.

“When is Wally supposed to be here?” Morgan questioned as he started the piece once more.

“Six,” Will replied, glancing at his watch. “Which means that I need to head to the airport. I’ll be back in a bit.”

“Bye,” Morgan called over his shoulder.

“Bye, love.” Hannibal placed a kiss on Will's cheek and Will went for the front door. “From the top, please, Morgan.”

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“Wally!” Morgan called when the front door opened. Morgan raced from the kitchen and through the front entryway to where Will and Walter were stepping through the door. He didn’t wait for Walter to put his bag down before he jumped into Walter’s arms.

“Hey, Einstein,” Walter muttered, returning the awkward hug. “You’re blocking the door.”

“Don’t care,” Morgan answered, his grip only tightening on the older. Walter chuckled and picked up Morgan, moving him out of the way so that Will could step further into the house. Morgan did his best to ignore the way that another person entered the home after him. “Missed you.”

“Missed you too, kid.” Walter set him down and Morgan released Walter despite the fact that he never wanted too ever again. “This is Amelia. Amelia, this is my kid brother Ezra.”

Morgan bit his tongue to hold back the dislike of the name that had been graced to him so long ago, preferring to hear his real name called in Walter’s voice. Morgan held out his hand and shook the girl’s hand, taking her in carefully. Her body was nothing, but curves covered in nearly skin tight

clothing that couldn't have been that comfortable. She held herself with a strength that Morgan placed similarly to Hannibal's. Commanding, controlling, dominating.

"Hi," Morgan grumbled. This wasn't the first girl that Walter had brought home and Morgan had resigned himself to understanding that this wouldn't be the last. But at least it was a new face. It was never the same girl twice. That had to mean something. Maybe commitment issues were on Walter's side, but it wasn't really a place for Morgan to say.

The night drew on slowly. It always seemed to be excruciating when Walter brough a girl home. Morgan found the conversations and company dull due to the fact that they had to dumb down any sort of interaction to the point where Walter's less than bright girlfriends could understand. Morgan assumed that there was a reason that Walter dated girls with half a brain cell, but Morgan couldn't exactly name why. Everything Walter did had a reason though.

After dinner, Hannibal was able to entice Amelia enough to help make dessert and that gave Morgan the chance to be alone with Wally, something that hadn't happened in well over a year. They walked around the backyard slowly, taking in the cooling night air. It would be snowing soon, and Morgan knew that it would be nearly impossible to get Walter to come back until Christmas. He hated the cold.

"I told them I wanted to be a doctor," Morgan piped up, interrupting Walter's ranting about some colleges he had enrolled in. Walter stopped dead in his tracks and Morgan's brows knitted in confusion over the concern that overtook Walter. "What?"

Walter opened and closed his mouth a few times, trying to piece together exactly how to respond before a hand ran through his hair. "How much do you know about them?"

"Dad and Father?" Morgan asked back, giving a shrug at Walter's nod. "I know Dad was a cop or something and Father was a doctor. And I'm not stupid, Wally. I know there's something darker there. Parents don't just teach their children how to commit insurance fraud and how to dig out of graves."

"There's a reason I call you Einstein." Walter's hand reached out and ruffled Morgan's styled hair and Morgan groaned.

"Stop that!"

The chuckle that came next was bright and warm, but when it stopped, Walter knelt to be beside Morgan and took Morgan's shoulders. "I want you to listen carefully to me. I'm not sure what they're going to teach you or how they plan on doing it, but you need to be prepared, alright?"

"More prepared than for killing someone?"

Walter gave a nod, eyes tight on Morgan's. "My guess is that cadavers won't always be what you're going to be practicing on if you're having Father teach you."

Morgan's eyes widened slightly as the recognition dawned on him and his mouth went dry. "They wouldn't have me-"

"Probably not right away, Einstein." Walter gave the boy's shoulders a squeeze and returned to his feet. "They are not very practical. Just be careful, ok?" Morgan nodded dumbly, jumping when

Hannibal's voice called from the back door that dessert was ready. "Come on, kid." Walter shoved his hands into his jean pockets and started off towards the house.

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Walter's shirt took the edge off the gnawing in Morgan's chest, but it did nothing to fill the hole that Morgan had lived with for the past year of sleeping alone. Maybe he should have listened to Walter when Walter had told Morgan they needed to start sleeping in separate beds.

The shirt might have smelt like sunshine, hard work, and a football pitch, but Morgan was nearly certain that it only made the night that much worse. He closed his eyes and hid his face in the fabric, wishing he had never stolen it from Walter's bag. He wasn't about to give it back, but what happened when Walter's scent disappeared? Would Morgan be able to find sleep again or was he just doomed to live in a half wistful snooze for the rest of his days?

"What do you think?" Will asked, resting his head in Hannibal's lap. He closed his eyes, sinking into the sensation of Hannibal's fingers through his hair. "Are you going to teach him?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't," Hannibal answered gently, eyes flickering lovingly over Will's face that was still just as angelic as it was the day, they had met so many years ago. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

Will's lips pursed in thought, and he shook his head with a shrug. "No. I don't think so."

"He already knows a decent amount of the basics. It wouldn't be difficult to start him working on something a bit more challenging."

"What exactly were you thinking?" When Hannibal didn't answer right away, Will sat up and turned to look at his husband, taking in the micro expressions on the man's face. "No." Will shook his head. "No. We're not having him practice on-"

"Not right away," Hannibal swiftly excused. "But even medical students must work on actual patients eventually. Cadavers can only teach so much. It won't prepare him for what will happen in an emergency room."

"I didn't think I would have to start grave robbing again so soon." Will groaned and flopped back down onto Hannibal's lap. Hannibal's half smile was sweet, and Will returned it. "We're getting too old for this."

"Grave robbing?" Hannibal asked curiously, eyebrows picked up.

Will nodded. "Grave robbing, combat training, running from the cops."

Hannibal hummed as he leaned over and placed a kiss on Will's lips. Will sighed into the kiss, his hand going to Hannibal's cheek to pull him closer. "Too old for sex?"

"God, no," Will muttered breathlessly between kisses.

# Chapter 14

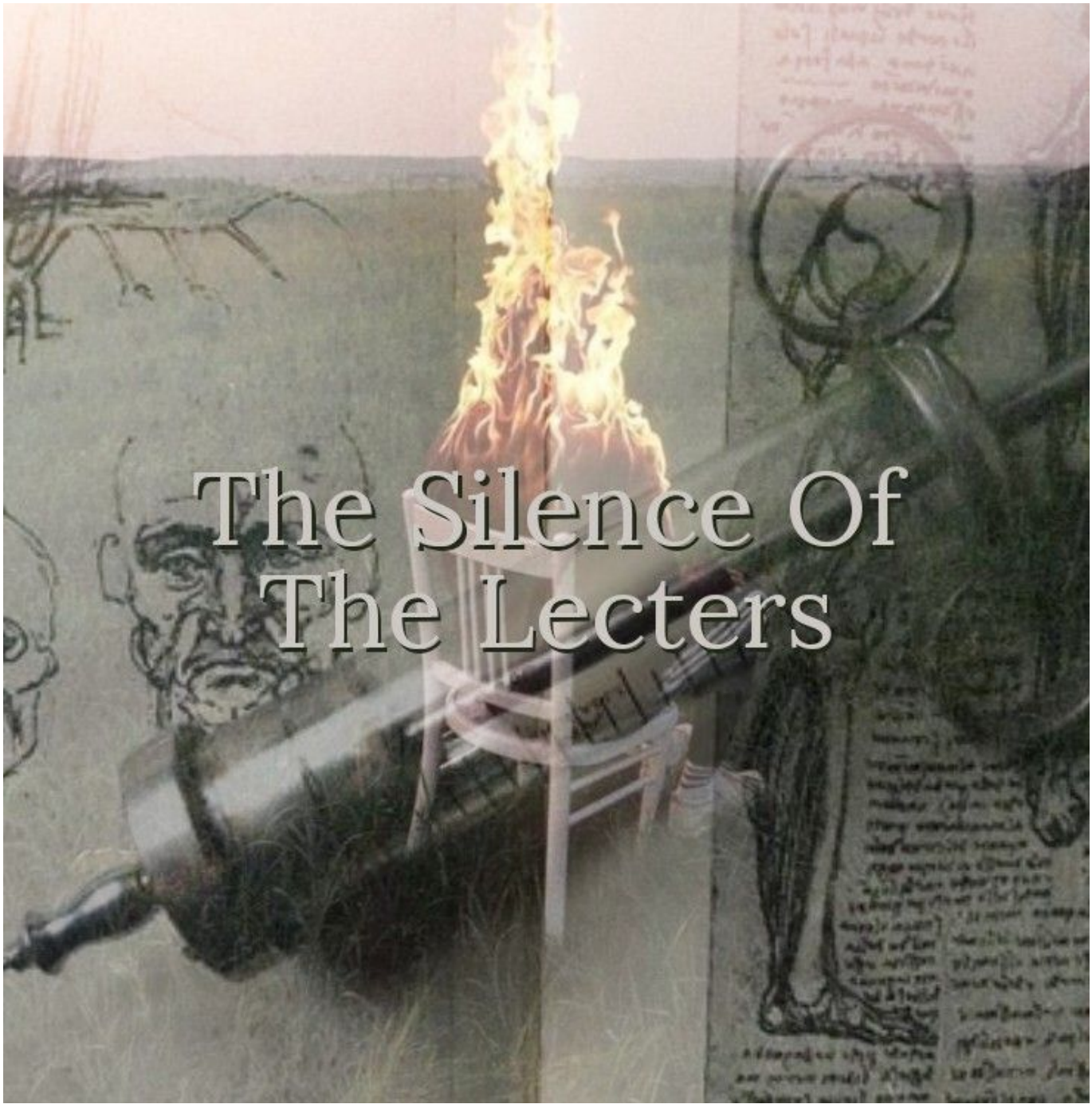
Chapter Summary

> When the door to the locker room shut, it was as if all of his self control had snapped. He screamed and punched at the shower wall. Over and over and over again until his knuckles began to hurt and turn bloody. A sob racked up his body and his stomach quickly followed it. He threw up until his throat burned from acid and then pushed himself to his feet.

Chapter Notes

> I did not edit this chapter. So any mistakes I am sorry for. And this one is darker. Just a fair warning now.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Morgan: 13

Walter: 20

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“Get the fuck out!” a shrill voice ordered, shoving Walter from the room. The door slammed shut and Walter nearly laughed as he stumbled into the hall. The world spun around him, but it always did nowadays. He honestly couldn’t remember the last time he had been any type of sober. His hand ran through his hair and pushed it from his face.

“I didn’t like you much anyways,” he whispered, wandering away from his now ex-girlfriend’s dorm room. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small packet of white powder. He hadn’t meant to get wrapped up in something so strong. The first time had been a complete accident. He had passed out drunk and one of his friends had injected him with the drug in an attempt to wake him up and ever since then he had been a slave.

He put some of the powder on the back of his hand and closed the bag. He inhaled it before rubbing the excess from his finger onto his gums. The effect wasn’t as instantaneous as injection or smoking would have been, but he didn’t care or have the patience to mix up such an item for use. This would do the job and once it kicked in, he wouldn’t feel like such a failure.

If he didn’t go to the gym every day of his life, Walter wasn’t sure if unsober him could find it. The cool night air did nothing to cool the heat that was starting to bloom over his skin from the cocaine and the streetlights were a bit too bright when he stepped under them.

He struggled to find the handle to the door and pull it open, but once he was inside, he went to the pull up bar and looked over the height of it as he tugged his jacket from his body. It was dropped to the floor, though Walter wasn’t entirely sure where it had landed. But that didn’t matter in the long run, did it? He doubted it.

He looked around the room for a moment before he found a box that was used for box jumps and pushed it over to the pull up bar. He stepped back to look over the distance between the two and gave an approving nod at his math skills. If there was one thing the world had blessed him with, it had been understanding numbers to an obnoxious level.

If he had been a little more observant, maybe taken his parents’ teachings more to heart, he might have noticed the way that the lights had already been on when he had stepped into the gym, but the thought didn’t reach through his fogged brain as he dropped himself down into a pushup to begin a burpee. Once back on his feet he jumped onto the box, then jumped up to the bar, pulling himself up fully before lowering himself back onto the box and wobbly jumping back to the ground to begin the motions once more.

Exercise had always been his go to to release all the tensions that had built up. The fights with his once girl, his grades slowly tanking. The fact that he was bound to lose his scholarship if he didn’t step up and start fixing shit. But it was so hard when there were other things out there that he had sunk himself into. Like ropes and gags, alcohol and drugs, and sports. Sports was his savor when the rest of the world seemed to be sinking around him.

His phone rang and he pulled it from his pocket to look at the screen that was blurred slightly. Morgan’s name stared back at him, but he wasn’t in the mood. And he wasn’t in the present enough to hide the fact that he had been drinking and was now high. He declined the call and tossed his phone towards where he thought his jacket was before starting his workout again, legs trembling with every movement.

Another few rounds left his heart pounding painfully in his chest or maybe it was just the drugs. He thought he was about to overheat, like his body was going to melt, but he couldn’t stop. Not until he worked himself to exhaustion. Then maybe he could sleep for once. Maybe he wouldn’t need another person in his bed if he were so tired that he couldn’t remember.

He dropped from the chin up and his stomach rose into his throat as he stumbled and fell off the box. He crashed into the floor and the room tilted and swirled with the jolt. His stomach lurched and a tingling filled his jaw as his stomach threatened to expel its dodgy contents.

“I knew you were using,” a familiar voice said from somewhere behind Walter. It was distorted, muffled, as if Walter had somehow been dunked underwater. A laugh brought him from the dull ache in his ankle, hip and elbow and he looked up to find his coach with arms folded over his chest and a smile that would have sent Walter running if he could find which way was up and which way was down. Maybe if he spit then he would be able to tell, but he couldn’t seem to make himself complete the action. “You can tell, you know?” Walter lowered his head to the floor and exhaled deeply as footsteps came closer to him. “Despite how hard you try to hide it, you can tell. The blown pupils, the erratic behavior.”

“*Eik šalin,*” (Go away) Walter muttered as he pushed his head up from the floor, Lithuanian the easiest thing for his mind to try to work in for whatever reason. The coach’s eyes only seemed to sparkle, and his smile grew to Walter’s dislike.

“How many languages do you know?” the man continued to step forward until he could crouch down beside Walter. Walter’s insides squirmed as fingers ran through his hair. He tried to move his head, but the fingers turned aggressive and snatched up a handful to yank Walter’s attention upwards.

“*Prašau baigti,* Rossi.*” (*Please stop.) He hated how weak his voice sounded. How weak his body suddenly felt when just moments ago he was certain he had enough energy to run to the moon and back.

“The way you say my name.” The fingers released Walter’s hair and trailed down and over his face until they snatched up his chin. Those green eyes would forever haunt him. He knew them in his nightmares even if they were only ever attached to a dark swirling mass of nothingness. He had never hated green more in his life. It filtered his world until everything was a hue of green and he couldn’t escape. A thumb pulled at Walter’s bottom lip and he shut his eyes tight, wishing that all of those years of training would snap back to the forefront of his mind, but they were lost in the denseness of the fog. “Say it again.”

“*Sustabdyk tai.”* (Stop it.) Walter swatted at the hand that held his face at attention and there was a laugh as he fell back to the ground, willing his body to move. Begging that it obeyed him, but maybe he had already given up and that’s why he could only push himself up onto his hands and knees, but no further. He hid his face in his forearms, body trembling through the effort.

Walter did his best to ignore the way that Coach Rossi stepped around his body, circling it like a vulture. He thought that maybe he had almost succeeded in erasing the footsteps from his mind when a hand rested on his back and trailed down lower and lower until it caressed over one of his ass cheeks.

That gave him the strength he needed. No one was allowed to touch him like that, especially not a man nearly the same age as his parents. Not a man with bad breath and greying hair. No man would ever touch him like his mother’s boyfriends had. Never again.

He pushed himself up onto his knees and shoved at the hand that had been touching him. He got to his feet, stumbling slightly, but gained his balance enough to throw a punch. It wasn’t his best by any means, but he hoped that it would hit the mark that he needed it to. He must have been more screwed up than he thought because Rossi took his arm and used the extra momentum to shove Walter forward and into an elliptical.

He could feel the sharpness of the machine colliding with his chest and he gasped for air as it was knocked out of him. Spinning, swirling. The room blurred and came back into focus harshly as he

once more found himself on the ground, blood turning his shirt sticky from where he had hit the machine.

“You’re into the hard stuff,” Rossi’s voice said from somewhere behind Walter. Walter used the machine to push himself back up onto his feet and turned to find his coach with a small bag of white that almost could have passed for flour if it were a bit more sifted. “You know that I could get you expelled for this, don’t you Grant?” The taunt turned Walter’s blood angry, but he held his tongue. He couldn’t fight this. He needed his scholarship. He needed this school. He needed to prove to his parents that he wasn’t worthless like he constantly felt. “Of course I wouldn’t do that to you though.” The words were cooed and Walter squeezed his eyes shut when his face was once more taken. “Not when we could come to an agreement, just the two of us.” Walter shook his head, but there was a tutting. “Come now, Grant. *Una mano lava l'altra.*” (One hand washes the other/ You scratch my back I'll scratch yours.)

Walter opened his mouth to argue, but before he could say anything, two fingers coated in white shoved themselves into his mouth and over his tongue. He seized up Rossi’s wrist, but the man only shook his head.

“Behave now, *Cerbiatto*,” (Fawn) Rossi instructed and Water did his best not to gag on the fingers that were forcing more drugs into his system. More drugs than what he should have. Drugs that wouldn’t only make the haziness lift for a moment but would shove him so much further into it that he doubted he would ever find his way out again. “You have such a talented tongue, Grant. It knows so many languages and so many commands.” Walter choked as the fingers pressed deeper into his mouth and he stumbled back. “I can show you what I would like you to do with your tongue.”

“*Atstok nuo manęs.”* (Get off me.) Walter coughed and spit, trying to get the taste of bitter salt from his mouth, watching as the bag was closed and added back to his things. “*Atstok nuo manęs,”* he repeated as he straightened himself up, tears lining his eyes that were beginning to burn.

“You belong on your knees, *Cattivo.”* Walter shuttered at the name in disgust, body obeying when fingers pressed into the bloody line of his shirt. Breath was stolen from him at a harder thrust into his wound and he dropped to his knees faster, the movement sending an ache through legs that had never truly been the same after being broken multiple times over and over. Walter could only stare, a sob leaving his throat as a belt was pulled slack. “*Silenzio ora.”* (Naughty boy.)

Walter’s hair was caught up in a fist once more and in instinct, Walter’s hands reached out for balance as he was pulled forward. His hands found themselves upon the jean fabric holding Rossi’s thighs. If he thought he felt dirty before, he had been wrong. The sly comments during practices and in the locker rooms. Lingering glances when passing by the showers. Touches that were more painful than anything else and often left him bruised and bloodied. But this was worse. Having his face pressed into Rossi’s hardened length, even if it were still trapped beneath fabric was more than enough to make Walter want to scrub himself clean.

“Get the fuck off of me!” Walter yelled, knowing that his sudden clarity would only be short lived. He shoved at Rossi and fell back to the ground, his skull aching with how harshly his hair had been held. “Don’t touch me!”

“Your defiance is beautiful, *Cerbiatto.*” There was a deep sigh. “But if you don’t want to be reported to the school board, I would suggest you learn to be submissive *velocemente*.” (Quickly) Walter shook his head and went to get to his feet, but stopped as Rossi continued to speak. “You

stay on the floor and behave or I will be getting a hold of the Dean and letting him know that I found you on school property after hours, causing damage while intoxicated. I'll make sure you lose your scholarship and that every school you could possibly get into will never accept you. Do I make myself clear?"

A yell clawed at the back of Walter's throat, but he held it down. He bit his words back. He couldn't lose this. He would only sink further if he did. He could shut up for a few minutes, hold his tongue. He doubted the man would last long anyways. Predators or rapists sometimes had issues keeping it up. Maybe it would earn Walter a punch or two, but then it would be over and he could go back to his dorm.

"Yes, Coach," Walter hissed through his teeth.

"Good. Now sit still so that I can take in your beauty."

Walter's stomach churned and he looked away when he could hear the sound of a zipper. He just had to pretend that he wasn't here. He could do that. Anywhere was better than here, but there was one place that would have been far better than this. Home. It was so odd tht even if he had never left the Italian Villa and would run away there every so often to detox himself, he didn't consider it home. No. Home was in Sweden with his parents and that annoying little kid that liked to cling to him. The kid who liked to steal his shirts and hide them, even though Walter knew Morgan did it.

That was something he could hold to. When he went to visit and shared a bed with whatever girl he dragged along with him, Morgan was in his own room, cuddling a piece of Walter. Walter let him steal the shirts. He understood perfectly how horrible it was to try to sleep alone. He didn't think it would bother him as much as it did. He shouldn't have let Morgan share his bed for six years. It had ruined both of them.

So any part of Walter that helped Morgan sleep, he could let the kid use it. If it were a shirt or a jacket or even a pair of socks, it was all fine. He had found comfort in the idea that on lonely nights he could pretend that that kid was still beside him, kicking him in his sleep, drooling while clutching a stupid bunny.

Walter was pulled from his head when something a little heavier than rain hit him. Over his face, down his neck and shirt. His throat constricted and his stomach jumped up, trying to exit his body. He kept his mouth shut tight, forcing his body to not turn itself inside out as grunts that he had been able to ignore bounced through his head.

"You're even prettier now." A laugh from Rossi about ripped the soul from Walter. The click of a phone camera wasn't subtle. Pictures of him that he never wanted to exist popping into life against his will. "Let's get you cleaned up."

Walter forced his eyes open and could only watch as Rossi picked up his jacket, phone and drugs. He shoved the items into the pockets and then stepped over to Walter, taking his arm. He was pulled to his feet and dragged towards the locker rooms. HIs body was shoved onto the floor of a shower and he jumped when cold water was turned on over the top of him.

"Get yourself cleaned up. I'll see you at weight training in the morning." Rossi tossed Walter's jacket aside on a bench and Walter watched as the man left, his back hitting one of the walls of the shower as water tumbled over him and turned his clothes heavy and clingy. "*Buonanotte Cattivo.*" (Good night, naughty boy.)

When the door to the locker room shut, it was as if all of his self control had snapped. He screamed and punched at the shower wall. Over and over and over again until his knuckles began to hurt and turn bloody. A sob racked up his body and his stomach quickly followed it. He threw up until his throat burned from acid and then pushed himself to his feet.

He turned off the shower and slopped over to his jacket, snatching it up and leaving the room. The outside air did an odd mix of chilling him from how wet his clothes were and not being cool enough with how incredibly hot his skin felt.

He wasn't sure how he made it back to his dorm, but he did. Somehow he got the door open and was able to turn on the light. He shut the door behind him and looked around. Giovanni wasn't here, which was just fine with him. He didn't want anyone else here, especially since he hadn't been able to bring himself to tell his secondary school friend that he was being abused by their coach.

Instead he went to the fridge and pulled his whiskey bottle from it, the bottle nearly empty. But it would do the job. The whiskey would make him forget and that's all he wanted to do. Giovanni had dealt with a drunk him more than enough to handle it when he came home. Walter dropped onto the couch and did his best to ignore the sticky that still covered him that the cold shower had done nothing to clean.

He took a long drink straight from the bottle. Forgetting wasn't enough. Feeling so incredibly dirty wasn't his idea of a good time. He reached for his jacket and dug through the pockets until he found the powder. A smile covered his lips at the idea that sparked through his head. He tipped the powder into the bottle and watched as it attempted to dissolve in the amber liquid. He shook the bottle about until it turned a milky honey color. Euphoria and forgetfulness. He could deal with that. It sounded better than where his mind sat now.

The first shot went down bitter, but Walter didn't care. The next drink sent his skin ablaze. His chest began to pulse and clench up as his heart picked up its pace. But no matter how much he got down or wasn't able to get down, those green eyes popped up.

They swirled around him with a lust that he couldn't escape. It was choking and hot and made his breathing shake and his stomach churn with nausea.

His hand found his phone through the green and before he knew it, he could hear Giovanni's voice on the other side of the line. "Hey man. What is going on?" Walter frowned at the laughter in the background. He must have taken too long to answer, because the name that followed was a bit more concerned. "Grant, what's happening?"

"I'm going to melt." Walter wasn't sure where the words were coming from, but they weren't a lie. He was on fire and the flames were green. Only green.

"What are you talking about?"

"It's so hot."

"Grant-"

"I don't want to see green anymore!" Walter's hands shook as he pressed it to his eyes. "Please!"

"Did you start taking again? I thought you stopped."

“His eyes won’t leave me alone!” They danced, twisted and turned all around him. Green the color of bottles shattering and rebuilding themselves over and over again, only coming back with a stronger gaze. “Help.”

“I’ll be there in a moment. Just hol...”

The voice trailed off as the phone slipped from Walter’s hand and he was consumed by licking green flames.

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“I’m home!” Morgan called as he stepped through the front door, grocery bags in hand. He wandered through the house until he reached the kitchen where he placed the bags on the counter. “I couldn’t find any truffles though.”

The silence of the house gave Morgan pause. His parents hadn’t mentioned going out and they were always sure to let Morgan know. Morgan’s brows furrowed and he stepped carefully through the house, food forgotten.

The house was more than familiar to him. He knew it inside and out, using the many rooms in the house to hide away and read when he wanted to be left alone, though he doubted his parents would care much if he were to just stay in the living room. They would probably leave him alone, but he didn’t want to be interrupted during a story if he could help it.

The only place he had never been allowed was the door under the stairs. He assumed that the door had been meant as a pantry or cupboard of some sort. Maybe for food storage or coats, but sometimes there would be a light on that covered the floor in a glowing type of color. The same light that he found now.

In every house they had lived in there always seemed to be some place, one room in the house where he was never allowed. Walter had been allowed in after Germany, but ever since that moment, Walter hadn’t exactly been the same. Which begged the question, what was behind this door? What was so horrible that Walter returned a different person and he wasn’t allowed anywhere near it?

They were home and that’s all that truly mattered. For now he could focus on putting groceries away and maybe getting dinner started. Then he had some more homework to finish. Morgan stepped away from the stairs and went back to the kitchen where he began to do just that. He had just pulled out a cutting board and some green onion to start chopping when a body rounding the corner caught his attention.

“I didn’t hear you come home,” Hannibal said with a small smile. Morgan lowered the knife and looked over Hannibal who had removed his suit coat and was simply in his button up with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows. His tie was missing and the first few buttons of his shirt were undone. Working. Physically working. “How were the shops?”

“I couldn’t find any truffles,” Morgan answered, brows furrowed. He hadn’t seen Hannibal dress like that unless they were cooking. If they did any sort of work at all, Hannibal had become a bit more casual over the years, wearing clothing appropriate for such work. So unless there was a hidden kitchen in that cupboard, then... “What are you doing?”

“Your dad and I have been working on something special for you.” There was a smile on Hannibal’s lips, one that was a bit larger than normal. Morgan slowly stepped around the counter,

straightening his dress shirt that suddenly felt a touch too tight. Hannibal left the kitchen and Morgan followed after him, back in the direction of the stairs. “We finally think that you’re old enough to begin more...” he paused as if deciding on a word, though Morgan knew Hannibal had already picked exactly what he wanted to say, “intensive medical training.”

“Oh?” Morgan asked, unsure of what else to possibly say in response to that. He had been working hard. Everything had been on textbook and paper. Sometimes on cadavers, but he was used to working on cadavers. He had been doing such a thing since he was a child. “As in...?”

Hannibal didn’t give him an answer though. Simply stopped beside the stairs, where the cupboard door was sitting wide open. Morgan glanced between his father and the door several times before stepping closer.

He couldn’t lie and say he had never been curious. He had always just pushed his curiosity aside in hope that he could cling to their family dynamic a bit longer. He knew that whatever his parents did in their free time wasn’t something that the world would smile on, but he didn’t dig. Didn’t want to fully understand. Didn’t want to ruin the facade he had lived in all his life.

“I can go in?” Morgan pointed to the open door hesitantly and at a nod from Hannibal, he inhaled deeply, finding the strength to step through the doorway. There was a staircase that led downwards in a spiral and as Morgan started down it, something cold prickled across his skin and made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end.

He hit the landing and came to a stop. A cold sweat started somewhere between his toes and turned his fingers clammy as something out of a horror movie stared back at him. Shining metal, cold and reflective. Something that could be cleaned easily. Drains. Shelvings of different types of chemicals. Some that Morgan recognized as cleaning supplies and others as medical.

Further in the room that was much larger than he thought it would be, stood Will beside a drawn curtain and what looked like a body on a bed of some sort. Morgan took a step back, his back hitting something solid, and he jumped to look up at Hannibal.

“You do not need to be afraid,” Hannibal said softly, voice thick with reassurance that didn’t quite reach Morgan. “This is simply to help you learn.”

Morgan’s mouth went sticky and a metallic taste rose from the back of his throat. Hannibal’s hand took his shoulder and pushed him forward, causing Morgan’s legs to move without his consent.

When he stood next to Will, he met Will’s gaze with uncertainty. Will gave him a half smile that he was sure was meant to be comforting, but it only twisted Morgan’s insides. The figure hidden behind the curtain, though still blurry, was much clearer now. A man if Morgan had to guess. A man struggling against some bindings on his legs and wrists where he was strapped down to a medical gurney, though his struggling wouldn’t yield any sort of progress.

Will stayed silent as he pushed the curtain back and Morgan found himself looking into a pair of terrified brown eyes. The man was no older than thirty if Morgan had to guess, but he didn’t look harmed in the slightest. Maybe he had been drugged to get him down here. There was no head trauma, nothing to suggest he had been beaten. But that didn’t stop how afraid he looked. A feeling that Morgan could only mirror and swallow down.

“I’m not understanding,” Morgan whispered, looking back over his shoulder and to his parents. Hannibal stepped closer and took Morgan’s shoulders, subtly angling him back towards the man

who was breathing hard under a strip of duct tape. Morgan didn't want to look. He winced and turned his head away.

"What was the topic we were last discussing in class?" Hannibal's tone was still soft and gentle.

"Appendicitis," Morgan got out, his stomach falling and making him want to run and hide.

"This is Mr. Felix Nilsson," Hannibal announced, stepping Morgan closer to the man who was struggling more and grunting behind the tape. Morgan hated the way that the table began to creak under the man. "He is suffering from a mild case of appendicitis. In his case antibiotics would be enough to stabilize the condition, but I don't think that would help you achieve the outcome you are looking for."

Morgan's eyes snapped open and he once more tried to step backwards, but found himself trapped firmly in Hannibal's grip. "I don't want to do this," Morgan whispered as it all came crashing in. "Please. I can keep working on cadavers."

"They will not teach you properly," the doctor explained. "This is going to show you proper medical procedures. How to set up a room, how to sedate a patient, how to perform surgeries correctly, how to clean up after. We worked hard and set this up for you to learn."

Morgan hated the way his insides twisted with guilt. It couldn't have been easy getting the man down here without anyone noticing. In broad daylight no less. They were only trying to help him learn. Only trying to teach him. How could he waste such an opportunity?

"As soon as he's stable, he'll go right back to his family," Will explained from somewhere behind Morgan, but all Morgan could do was watch those brown eyes beg him not to. "We're helping him, son. He's sick and you can help him. That's what you wanted to do, right? Help people feel better? This is your first chance."

"And he really is sick?" Morgan asked in nearly a whisper, wishing his cotton mouth to go away.

"It wouldn't teach you anything if I found someone who didn't have the condition we were trying to fix." Hannibal gave Morgan's shoulders a squeeze and released the boy.

"You said once he was stable. Will he be here for the next two days?" Morgan finally took a small step closer, a frown on his face. "Recovery is two to four weeks after up to two days in a hospital."

"Your father and I will take care of him," Will assured. "There's nothing you need to worry over after surgery."

Morgan's stomach lurched at the word. He didn't think that he could. The man was alive. This was so different from a body that was already long dead. How could he possibly do-"

"Let's help him," Hannibal said with a final push.

If it was helping this man.... Morgan couldn't say no. He could help this man and learn in the process. And an appendectomy wasn't such a complicated procedure that Morgan couldn't complete it. If Hannibal stayed by his side the entire time, he was sure he could do it.

"I want to help him," Morgan announced with a nod.

Chapter End Notes

Today is the day that everything ended. That my future has been completely wiped clean. Everything that was a whisp of color in front of me has blown away on a breeze and I am left with nothing but my mind once again. Promises not kept, dreams laid to be buried in the field of the life be that was meant to be ours. A life that I will always want to be ours... A life I hope is unburied with time, but maybe one shouldn't revive dead things. But is it dead when it never even had the chance to breathe? When we never had the chance? When all I wanted was for someone, for once in my life, to pick me the same way that I picked them. I hope someday someone will pick me the same way that I pick them.

"Be sure of me. Surer. Know that this is an absolutely terrible idea and do it anyway. Kiss me while everyone is watching, hold onto me in public and love me loudly. Let the timing be wrong, always, but choose me anyway. Make it hard work. Make it near impossible work. Unachievable, unattainable work and make us long to do it anyway. This will not be an easy Sunday morning kind of love. This will be a Monday evening, sink full of dishes, empty fridge, no money for takeout kind of love. A hill that you're not really sure ever ends kind of love, a favorite jumper in the wash kind of love. An incredibly inconvenient kind of love. But. Pick. Me. Anyway. Every morning, pick me again. Choose me daily without pause or breath, make bad decision after bad decision and eventually let it all make sense. Let enough bad decisions turn into something worthwhile. Wake up next to me in three months' time, brush the sleep out of my eyes and the rattiness out of my hair and think to yourself... 'I cannot believe I ever thought this love was a bad idea.'" -Isabella Dorta

# Chapter 15

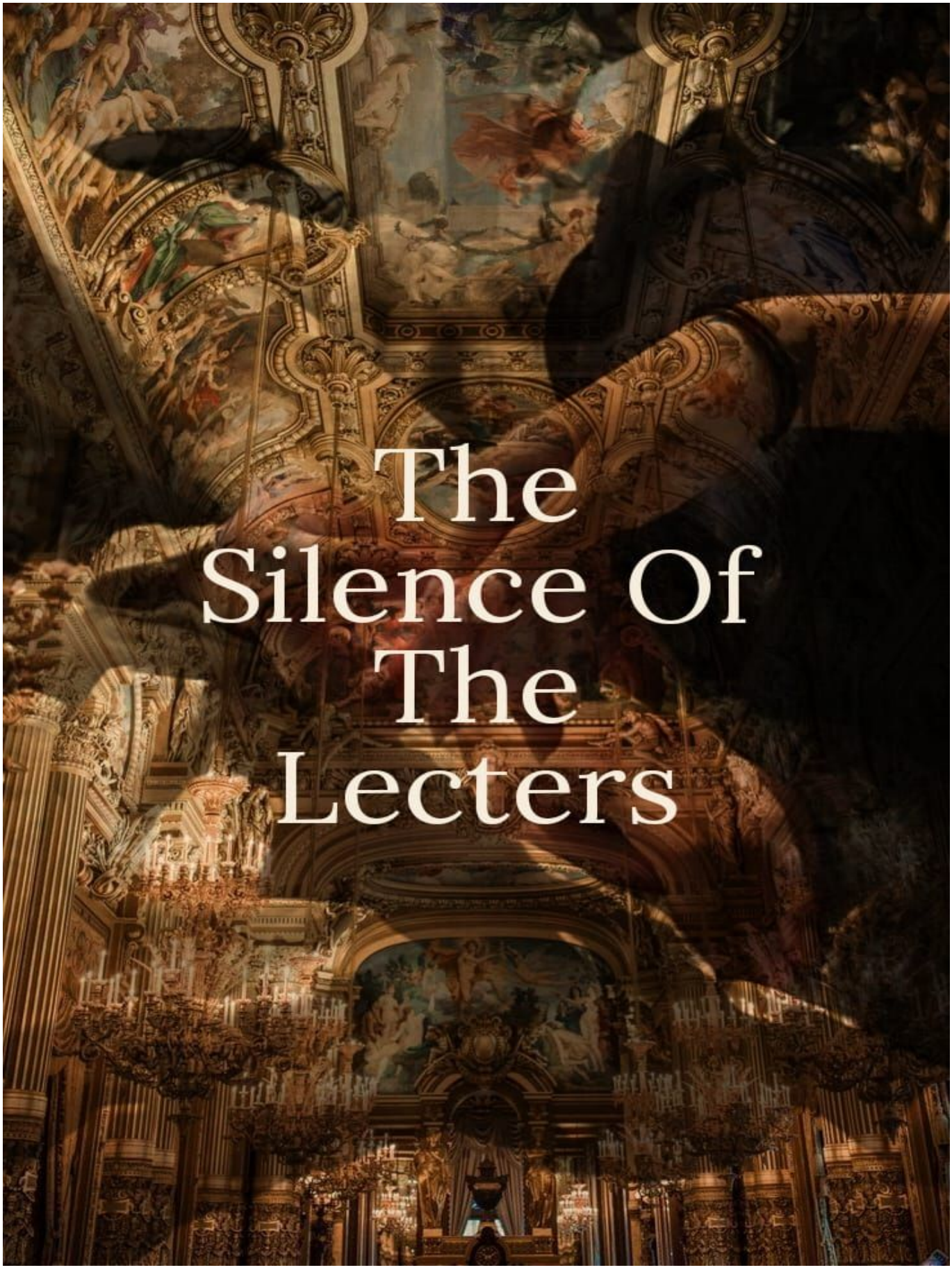
Chapter Summary

Walter’s eyes stayed on Morgan as Morgan slowly stepped through the long hall. Crystal chandeliers fell every few feet, catching the light from the multitude of arched windows that were exactly opposite from panels of mirrors. Each mirror was broken up with golden statues that held up more crystal light fixtures. Thirty painted compositions on the vaulted ceilings were done in the baroque style that Walter knew Morgan liked and the boy nearly fell backwards as his head tipped back to look at them.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been so long. Life kinda took a hard hit at me, so to apologize I'll post two chapters. I have been working hard on splitting the next few chapters up. They were one giant chapter that was like a billion words long. Haha. I hope you enjoy.

Also, this is where some of the underage tags are going to come into play. Fair warming.


The
Silence Of
The
Lecters

Morgan: 14

Walter: 21

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“You have enough money?” Will asked, a hand on Walter’s shoulder who rolled his eyes with his normally bright smile.

“We have enough money,” Walter assured. “We’re not about to buy Notre Dame.”

“We won’t be back until tomorrow morning,” Hannibal pressed on. “Possibly later.”

“I have been living on my own for the last four years. We’ll be fine. I promise,” Walter guaranteed, glancing over to where Morgan stood, looking around them at the bustling city street where a massive amount of road construction was being done and dozens of cars were angrily beeping their horns in a poorly made roundabout with orange barricades. “Ready to go Einstein?” Morgan looked back over to Walter, and it took a moment or two for the kid to be pulled from his thoughts, but he gave a nod with a brilliant smile covering his lips. “We’ll see you tomorrow.”

Walter turned away from Will and Hannibal and moved over to Morgan, a hand taking the younger boy’s shoulder to pull him down the road. “How do you know where we’re going?” Morgan asked as he let the hand guide him through the streets of people passing.

“I’ve been here a few times. I like to travel on my school breaks.” Walter slung his arm over Morgan’s shoulders and rubbed at the shell of his gelled hair. Morgan tried to shrug out of the grip, but Walter held him tightly, only digging his fingers further into the kid’s hair to mess it up with a chuckle. “Spoiled little thing. All proper and prissy. Relax, will ya?”

“Wally, stop,” Morgan grumbled, trying to push at Walter once more and Walter only let go with a jump as Morgan’s fingers found his ribs and dug into them.

“Hey!” Walter hissed behind a forced laugh from being tickled. “I’m trying to have a good time with you and you’re going to start acting like this? I haven’t seen you in months.”

“You could always come and visit us in Sweden, you know,” Morgan grumbled, arms folded over his chest, though he kept up his pace with Walter to not get lost in the crowds. The angry traffic was slowly being left behind as they wandered down smaller streets. “You’d like it there.”

“It’s cold there,” Walter shot back, taking Morgan’s arm to pull him across the street.

“It gets cold in Italy too.”

Walter halted once they were on the opposite sidewalk and turned to face Morgan, hands on both of his shoulders to look into those wintery blue eyes that were overcast with a frown. “I promise that I will come visit if you can name one fun thing there is to do there.” Morgan’s eyes blinked several times with a new brightness, but it quickly dimmed before Morgan looked away and pulled from Walter’s grip. Walter gave a loud laugh and pulled Morgan along with him. “See? All there is is the ABBA museum. Who wants to see that?”

“ABBA has good music,” Morgan pointed out. “You’re just upset because Father told you you couldn’t listen to them in the house anymore after having their songs on repeat for three days.”

“Alright, Einstein,” Walter challenged with a grin. “What is there to see?”

“There’s a bunch of castles and museums,” Morgan suggested hopefully. “Art galleries.”

“You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all,” Walter teased, tossing a glance at the younger boy over his shoulder. He wasn’t about to make it easy on Morgan. That wasn’t his job as an older role model. He was meant to torment and teach, not spoil and pamper like his parents enjoyed doing for the kid. Walter had to toughen him up. He was such a delicate little flower. Walter could blow him over with a single huff and puff. “Now you’re sounding like you don’t even want me there.”

“We could hike through Sarek National Park,” Morgan tried once more, speeding up his stride to be side by side with Walter who was leading them towards a large train station where businessmen and women were walking around in nice clothing with briefcases and cell phones pressed to their ears as they marched this way and that in a hurry. “You would like it there. There are lakes we could visit.”

“You don’t like water,” Walter pointed out, a hand digging into his jean pockets before he located two pieces of paper, passing one over to Morgan who took it and glanced over it. RER C. Morgan looked up and watched as Walter glanced around before finding the right gate they wanted and heading for it. Morgan followed a step behind.

“There’s an ice hotel that I’ve been wanting to see,” Morgan offered, a little more desperation in his voice.

“Cold.” Morgan frowned, anger in his blood, and he purposefully stepped on the back of Walter’s converse, pulling it from the back of the man’s foot. Walter stumbled slightly and looked down at his shoe before shooting Morgan a dark look for the act. “You’re such a child,” Walter scolded in a low voice as he bent over to slip his foot back into his shoe. “I don’t know why I put up with you.”

“The ice hotel melts every year, so it has to be rebuilt,” Morgan pressed on, eyes once more dropping to the ticket in his hand. “The interior is always different. They make ice sculptures, and the rooms are made out of ice. It’s only one night. They have a warm room that you spend the rest of the time in. They have saunas and hot showers and warm drinks whenever you’d like them. They also...”

Walter stood upright and paused as Morgan’s voice stopped. His brows furrowed in curiosity as he looked over the well-dressed kid who was simply staring at the train ticket in his hand.

“Einstein?” Walter asked cautiously.

Morgan’s eyes read the words once more across the ticket before he looked up. *Versailles château – Rive gauche.*

“Versailles?” Morgan asked, a smile tugging at his lips, though he tried not to let it show. Walter didn’t deserve the satisfaction for playing at Morgan’s heartstrings for affection.

“*Oui, Le Château de Versailles*,” Walter agreed with a nod of his head. “And if we don’t hurry, we’re going to miss our train.” Walter was nearly certain that the boy didn’t hear him because Morgan didn’t move. He simply continued to wear a half smile that was desperately trying to hide away. Walter wasn’t exactly sure what the odd tug in his chest was, but it was painful, and he frowned. “Come on, Einstein. You want to see it, don’t you? Not just think about it?”

“Yes,” Morgan answered breathlessly.

“Then come on.” Walter snatched up Morgan’s wrist and pulled Morgan back along through the train station, over white marbled floors and through swirling metal work before they entered a large green train to sit on one of the benches.

Walter glanced over at Morgan who was basically vibrating in his seat. Walter couldn’t stop the smile over his lips, and he reached out unconsciously to push back a dirty blonde wave from Morgan’s face. Morgan’s eyes jumped to Walter and Walter quickly looked away, embarrassment filling every limb of his body, though he wasn’t exactly sure why.

“Are you excited?” Walter asked, clearing his throat to somehow push the flush from his skin.

“Extremely. I’ve always wanted to see Versailles. It’s supposed to be covered in gold.”

Walter gave an absent nod and his fingers picked at the peeling leather in the seat beside his leg. “I’ll make sure to come visit you guys soon. I’m sorry I haven’t been home lately. School has just been busy.”

Walter could feel Morgan’s eyes looking over him carefully before they stopped somewhere, and Walter froze as gentle fingers pressed into a bruise that was on his arm. “What happened to you?” Morgan asked.

Walter pulled his arm free and tugged on his shirt sleeve in hopes of covering the markings over his bicep. “Nothing. I just got hurt during a practice.”

“How?” Morgan asked in disbelief, hand once more reaching for Walter’s arm, but Walter quickly snatched up Morgan’s hand with a tight smile.

“I tripped and fell into some weights during the morning workout. I’m alright. Really.”

Morgan’s brow rose in question, but he must have accepted the answer, because he didn’t push Walter. Instead, he gave a single nod and pulled his hand, almost hesitantly, from Walter’s grip. Walter quickly released his hold and rubbed his hands over his jeans.

He didn’t like lying. And he especially didn’t like lying to Morgan. Morgan was his best friend and had always been his best friend. Ever since they were children, they had been friends and Walter had tried never to lie to Morgan. It wasn’t even that this was a lie. It was the truth, just not the full truth. Walter wasn’t even sure if he could lie at this point in his life. Hannibal would have him strung from his toes if he lied and he didn’t want to put that working theory to the test. Besides, what was the big difference between being tripped and tripping himself? The schematics and fine details of it really weren’t all that important.

“How old are you now, Einstein?” Walter questioned, desperate to find a new line of dialogue for them to engage in. One that didn’t involve his injuries and one that didn’t leave them in silence. “Nine, ten?”

“Fourteen,” Morgan corrected hotly. “You know this. We came out to see you for my birthday. We went to the *Ca' Rezzonico*.”

“I don’t know what you like so much about that stuffy old building.”

“It is the perfect representation of Venetian life in the Rococo period,” Morgan defended. “Do you have any idea how long ago that building was built? It was made in-”

“-1660 by Baldassare Longhena, the *greatest* Baroque architect in Venice,” Walter said mockingly over the top of Morgan with a small smile. Morgan fell silent, a blush on his cheeks and he looked away as the train finally started off, the grinding loud around them, though the cart was decently empty.

“What-What is going on at school?” Morgan stuttered out; embarrassment clear in his voice as he watched the world pass outside of the window. “What’s so bad that you can’t come visit? I...” There was a small pause. “I miss you; you know. You hardly answer my letters anymore.”

“Do you know how hard it is to find time between schoolwork to answer your letters, Einstein?” Walter asked with a roll of his eyes. “Why can’t you get a phone like a normal kid?”

“Father doesn’t approve of me having a phone,” Morgan explained softly. “Otherwise, I might talk to all of my friends and not focus on schoolwork.”

“Friends?” Walter asked curiously. Morgan gave a minute shrug of his shoulders and Walter frowned. “You don’t have any friends.”

“Why do I need friends when I have you?” Morgan met his gaze for a moment and Walter stared at the innocence in the blue that once more tore at something in his chest. Morgan quickly looked away. “I’m still homeschooled, I don’t have much time to go out to make friends. Not that anyone would want to be my friend anyways. What could I possibly offer?”

“Einstein,” Walter scolded gently, a hand naturally reaching out to mess with the kid’s hair again. “It’s not healthy for me to be the only one in your life.”

“You must have a lot of homework, huh?” Morgan gave a nervous little smile and Walter frowned. “Father gives me so much to do that sometimes I feel like I’m drowning.” There was a slight laugh. “And Dad works me to the bone. I’m all cut up under my shirt. I ran into some tree branches.”

“Doing what?” Walter stole a quick look around the train, finding only a small handful of people who all looked more consumed in their mobile devices or reading materials than their conversation.

“We have trees in the backyard like we did in Germany, Wally. You would know that if you’d come to visit more during the summer instead of just during the holidays when everything is covered in snow.”

“What happened?”

“We were playing hide and hunt.” Morgan gave a shrug and once more looked out of the window and at the fields of wildflowers around them. “Dad was chasing after me and I tripped and fell down a hill. I got back to my feet and just ran without checking my surroundings. I ran into a thicket of low branches, and they ripped through my shirt. One was thick and knocked the wind out of me. Let’s say that I had a very stern reprimand when Dad finally caught up to me. It was pathetic. I couldn’t catch my breath until Father helped me.”

Walter nodded, knowing the sensation well. The panicked desperation as his lungs refused to pull air back into them and only forced what little air he had out. He could feel Hannibal’s hand to his

sternum and his firm voice ordering him to breathe while blood poured from his freshly broken nose.

“And what is your homework about?”

Morgan tipped his head side to side. “Mostly medical procedures now. We don’t talk about the rest of it much anymore. Not since you left, and I told them I wanted to be a surgeon.”

“You do?” Walter asked curiously.

“See, you don’t read my letters!” Morgan pointed out, nudging his elbow painfully into Walter’s ribs. Walter winced but did his best to hide the motion. “I told you that I did. And you and I are already far more advanced in that aspect than normal people. And I...” Morgan trailed off, chewing on his tongue, eyes hallowed and dead. He quickly shook his head and plastered a smile over his face, causing Walter to want to ask what was wrong, but he didn’t have the chance. “I like to help people.” Those weren’t the words that Morgan was going to say, those weren’t the words that Morgan wanted to say. What had he wanted to say? “What about you? Are you still working on sports medicine?”

“No,” Walter replied with a shake of his head. “I’m in math now.”

“Gross.”

Walter snickered at the comment. “I want to be a teacher, but because I changed my major, I’m taking extra credits to make up for the time I’ve wasted. That’s why I haven’t come to visit. I don’t really have the time. I’m kind of fucking myself up with this trip. I should really be at home, studying.”

“You want to be a teacher?” The words were slow and tasted carefully by Morgan who looked thoroughly confused by the concept. “Why on earth do you want to be a teacher?”

“I want to take something that is difficult to understand and make it something that everyone can do. I want people to enjoy learning.” Walter shrugged with his words and slouched back on the bench beside Morgan. Morgan’s brow was arched, and Walter frowned. “What’s that look for?”

“You hate learning.”

“But you don’t,” Walter pointed out softly. “You read constantly, you get excited by new information and want to tell everyone and their dog about how the Pony Express lasted like five years or something.”

“Eighteen months,” Morgan corrected before he could stop himself and he could feel a heat come to his cheeks as Walter bit down on his bottom lip. Walter had said the wrong thing on purpose and Morgan had fallen for it just as he always did. He always had to correct, inform, make sure that the world knew exactly why his nickname was what it was.

“You find joy in expanding your mind and that stupid little smile you get when you figure something out is something that I’ve never seen on anyone else. I want other people to get that same stupid little smile,” Walter continued in a quiet tone. “I want their eyes to light up and their heads to jerk up to immediately tell someone what they found out. I want...” Walter’s eyes met blue and his mouth went dry. “More of you in the world.”

Morgan snorted his laughter and shook his head, playfully hitting Walter's arm who once more winced as the bruise was knocked into, but Morgan didn't notice. "You do not want more of me in the world." Morgan shook his head. "You're crazy."

"Maybe," Walter agreed softly. Morgan stared at him a moment more, a silence falling as something heavy settled between the two of them. Something dense that Walter couldn't name, and he was grateful that the train's whistle blew, and they came to a halt, signaling that their ride was over. "We have a bit of a walk. Come with me."

Morgan got from his seat and followed Walter's strong steps, watching the man's movements curiously. There was a slight limp in Walter's steps and Morgan blinked several times. He wasn't sure he had ever seen Walter limp before, save for once during some training.

Hannibal got a shovel to the face and dropped instantly, nose bleeding. Walter had turned to run, but a hand had snatched up his ankle and Walter had dropped, knee hitting the shovel. He couldn't walk afterwards and when he finally could through a largely blue and purple swollen kneecap, he had limped for a good week.

Morgan wanted to ask, but after the bruising on Walter's arm, he found himself hesitating. Would Walter react the same way? He stepped a little closer and took Walter's hand in his, shocked by his own boldness. Walter stumbled to stop and turned back to face Morgan with a questioning tip of his head.

"What did you do to your leg?"

"Someone stepped on my shoe and scuffed up my ankle," Walter answered in a voice that was far quicker than it should have been, and Morgan pursed his lips, his other hand taking Walter's arm to hold him in place so that the man couldn't move. Walter sighed. "I'm fine," he assured. "I mean it."

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you Wally?" Morgan asked softly, pleading in his voice as he gave a slight tug on Walter's hand.

"I wouldn't lie to you Morgan."

Morgan still didn't look convinced, but at some of the stares he could feel on them, he let the conversation go and dropped Walter's hand. Even if they would never step back into this city together again and if people here most likely didn't care, he didn't need to put that kind of attention onto Walter. Walter wasn't like that, would never be like that.

Morgan had never had an issue with the world seeing him as he was, and he was certain that Walter could see straight through him and knew exactly what type of a person he was. Walter had to know that Morgan was gay, and Walter had to know how it felt to have his chest go tight when he saw someone he liked. Walter had to know exactly that that was what Morgan had been feeling since yesterday. Since Walter had met them at the airport.

Morgan hadn't expected the months to change Walter as much as they had. He hadn't expected Walter's coca cola dark hair to have grown out from its usual short haircut and it must have been a challenge to how Hannibal wanted him to present himself. He hadn't expected the locks to fall across Walter's forehead and into his buttery brown eyes that were somehow far brighter when they fell on Morgan than they were when they looked away.

He hadn't expected to see Walter with more muscle and a five o'clock shadow over his cheeks and chin, nose still a little crooked from having been broken multiple times but still splattered with freckles. He hadn't expected Walter to be wearing something more fitting for a day out, more presentable than his normal soccer uniform or workout clothes. He just... Hadn't expected Walter to look so grown up. He hadn't expected Walter to leave him behind once again, but that was what Walter was good at. Leaving Morgan behind. He didn't do it on purpose, but it was a constant and it only made Morgan feel that much more distant from his best friend. A friend he hadn't seen or spoken to in what felt like years but had probably only been five months at most.

"Let's go," Morgan said quickly before Walter had a chance to tease him about his staring. "It's getting hot out."

Walter sighed and spared Morgan by glancing at the world around them before squinting up at the sun. "It is a bit warmer today, isn't it? Maybe we can stop at *Une Glace à Paris* or *La Fabrique Givrée* when we get back into the city." Walter nodded his head down the street and Morgan followed him, unbuttoning his dress shirt sleeves and rolling them up to aid in cooling down the warmth from the sun.

"Aren't they expensive?"

Walter gave a shrug. "They would fit your standards."

"I don't need fancy ice cream to be happy, Wally."

"I suppose not. Forget I offered then." He shot Morgan a smile and Morgan rolled his eyes.

"You're absolutely obtuse," Morgan grumbled, though there was no bite in the words as his eyes trailed up the endless row of tall trees they had come to. They lined the street in a pit of gravel, their branches high above the ground and covering the ground in a thin layer of bright green leaves that helped block out the sun.

Walter chuckled as the boy's steps stopped once more and he gave Morgan a moment to let the surroundings sink in before he took the kid's arm. "Come on, Einstein. This isn't even the impressive part."

Morgan stumbled after Walter and down the long line of trees. Only when they came to the end of it did the world open back up and Morgan found himself in a parking lot with tour buses that blocked the view of a large and ornate building.

They wandered through the grey buses and through throngs of people until they stopped in front of a metal-worked fence, each and every inch of it covered in a shimmering gold. Each *fleur de lis* that slowly built up into a crown above the entrance to the gate made of gold.

Beyond the metal work stood Versailles, tall and proud. The roof was made of a deep and slanting blue, statues were carved delicately into the spaces between each window and a large balcony made up the palace, each inch of it that was not crafted marble once more draped in a rich gold. The marble that the courtyard was made from shone brightly with the warm morning sun and the French flag waved in the wind.

"I think I get why the people were so upset and started the revolution now," Morgan whispered, and Walter laughed brightly with a shake of his head.

“Let them eat cake,” Walter quoted, shoving his hands into his pockets, and looking carefully over the kid beside him who could not seem to tear his ogling away from the architecture.

“She never actually said that,” Morgan continued in a soft voice, attention more pointed to in front of him than on Walter. “If she had said anything of the sort it would have been *Qu’ils mangent de la brioche*. Brioche is a sweet bread, very different from cake. And the quote has been said all throughout history. You can search through 16th-century Germany folklore and find a similar antidote of why the hungry poor don’t simply eat *Krosem*, another sweet bread. The first person to put that quote into writing was Rousseau in Book VI of his *Confessions*. He had said that a *great princess* had said the words. Now, Marie Antoinette was a princess, but she was just a girl at the time that the book was written and nowhere near France. She wasn’t the princess that Rousseau was referring to. If you-”

“Do you ever breathe, Einstein?” Walter demanded with another laugh. Morgan fell silent with a flush and looked away quickly from where Walter’s eyes were on him. Walter sighed. “I-I’m sorry. Who really said the quote?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Morgan whispered, but he looked up with a hurt and fake smile. “Can we go in?”

“Einstein, I want to know,” Walter enforced, a concerned look on his face. “Please tell me.”

“You’re not going to make a very good teacher if you make fun of your students for their knowledge.”

Walter looked at the cobblestone ground and kicked at a loose rock. “I suppose I won’t be, will I?”

“It was Marie-Thérèse, a Spanish princess who married a French king. But she said something more along the lines of *la croûte de pâté*, which you know is pie crust. Over the next century, French royals would be blamed for the quote, though I personally believe that the revolutionists attributed it to Marie Antoinette, so they had more reason to hate her, despite how charitable and concerned she was over France’s poor population.” Morgan waved his hand to dismiss the answer and stepped away from Walter. “Can we please see the inside now?”

Walter nodded and followed Morgan toward the side of the building where they stepped through a gate and into the courtyard, Morgan’s head tipped back so he could look once more at the building.

“Here, I want to show you my favorite place,” Walter muttered, stepping past Morgan who stared for a moment longer before racing after Walter’s retreating form and around other tourists in his way. Walter smiled as he listened to the eager footsteps chase after him before they slowed beside him. “It’s breathtaking.”

Walter guided Morgan through a few halls until they reached a line to a set of doors. The pair were quiet as they waited for their turn to enter the room and when they did, Morgan stopped in the doorway, blocking everything. Walter gave a fond smile and pulled Morgan along so that he wouldn’t stop others from enjoying.

Walter’s eyes stayed on Morgan as Morgan slowly stepped through the long hall. Crystal chandeliers fell every few feet, catching the light from the multitude of arched windows that were exactly opposite from panels of mirrors. Each mirror was broken up with golden statues that held up more crystal light fixtures. Thirty painted compositions on the vaulted ceilings were done in the

baroque style that Walter knew Morgan liked and the boy nearly fell backwards as his head tipped back to look at them.

“*La Galerie Des Glaces*,” Walter said, a smile pulling at his lips as Morgan’s eyes darted to him for a moment before returning to the ceiling. The boy slowly circled, neck craned. “Designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart and built between 1678 and 1684. It connects the king and queen’s bed chambers. The paintings are by Charles Le Brun.” Morgan gave a small nod, standing upright once more and rubbing his neck. “There’s 357 mirrors,” Walter continued, hands behind his back as he slowly stepped through all the bodies around them, eyes still firmly on Morgan who had wandered over to a statue to look over it carefully. “*Rouge de Rance* pilasters also by Le Brun. *Fleur de lis* topped by a royal sun between two Gallic roosters.”

“How do you know so much?” Morgan asked softly, eyes finally leaving the majesty of the room and landing on Walter, who came to a stop at the blue. Walter gave a small shrug in answer, quickly breaking eye contact and turning toward the ceiling. “You did pay attention in class, didn’t you? Dad said you did, but I didn’t fucking believe him.”

“I struggle to sit still,” Walter muttered coldly. “But my movement does not impede my hearing. Father would often discipline me after class when you left.”

“He punished you a lot,” Morgan agreed. “Though, I think you deserved some of them.”

“Did I?”

“Yeah.” There was nothing subtle about the way the word was said, and Walter’s brows knitted together as he looked over the young boy. “You would talk back all the time or argue with his lessons. You would draw instead of doing the assignments. Do you know how many times you cut yourself on the scalpels after father told you to be careful with them? And you would hide things from him. His textbooks, the chalk for the blackboard, his lesson plans. And you would fall asleep in class all the time too. You were impossible.”

Walter leaned over and closer to Morgan, eyes flickering over his face and the hair that the sun liked to bleach a bit blonder in the summer, though it never seemed to color the boy’s skin.

“We can’t all be fucking perfect like you, can we, Einstein?” Walter asked in a whisper, lips beside Morgan’s ear. Walter couldn’t be sure, but he swore he could see Morgan shiver with the words. Walter closed his eyes with a deep breath and took a swift step back at the smell of artificial strawberries in Morgan’s waves. "Let’s keep going."

"Don’t you want to stay? You said this was your favorite," Morgan pointed out, spinning around to follow Walter.

“Did I?” Walter mused in disinterest and Morgan couldn’t stop the confused expression from covering his face. “Well, I might change my opinion.”

“What? Why?”

Walter only shook his head, eyes looking everywhere around the room but at Morgan. “Never mind. *Carpe diem* and all that shit. You might want to impress someone one day with a date here.”

“Yeah, sure,” Morgan mumbled, mouth suddenly very dry.

Walter came to a stop and glanced over Morgan carefully. “What?” he asked after a moment.

“It’s difficult to make people like art,” Morgan answered softly. “People don’t just enjoy going to museums and stuff. They must be taught to appreciate it.”

“People?” Walter questioned and Morgan could only blush at the word that Walter had picked out. Morgan wasn’t ready to tell his best friend that he was gay, and it was ridiculous. Their parents were men, and his own parents were women, but somehow, he just couldn’t say that to Walter, even though he was certain that Walter already knew. “Guess you’re right.”

“Are we strange? To enjoy things like this?”

“Yes,” Walter answered with a shrug. At Morgan’s frown, he quickly corrected himself. “I mean, I feel that way, but this suits you. Things like this have always suited you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You're no different from how you were always going to be,” Walter answered, leading the way through a door and into the *Grand Appartement de la Reine.* Morgan once more came to a stop to gaze at the room that was gaudy and covered in a mash of pink floral wallpaper. Two large chandeliers fell on either side of the bed that matched the wallpaper and were also covered in gold.

“What I was destined to be,” Morgan mused softly, his hand snatching up Walter’s arm so the man would stop walking. Morgan’s eyes glanced towards Walter who stopped obediently, but who didn’t meet his gaze. His eyes were trained to the gold and there they stayed, even after Morgan released his grip.

“Yes,” Walter affirmed with a nod.

“And what about you?”

Walter gave a shrug, eyes dropping down to the four-poster bed that was covered in a ridiculous bedspread. “I was going to be a normal American kid from humble origins, going to college on a scholarship but with a poor education. Maybe drop out to chase some stupid baseball fantasy that would leave me somehow further in debt than I was already. Father changed that. Now I speak three and a half other languages,” -Morgan snickered and nudged into Walter at the mention of how rubbish he still was at German and Morgan was happy to see a small smile on Walter’s lips- “I know and appreciate more about art than I ever have, history, geography, and I am more than capable of things that a soldier or a doctor can do.”

The smile fell and there was a resentful sigh from the man, and he ran a hand through his hair, trying to push it back and Morgan had to wonder if Walter liked his hair being that long or if it really was just to piss off their parents. Morgan would never tell Walter that he enjoyed it longer.

“Would you prefer another life?” Morgan asked, wishing that Walter didn’t. Morgan enjoyed exactly what they had, even if there was a lot of blood between all the sugar, but the sugar made it worth it in the end. Especially since he had someone like Walter to share it all with.

Walter tipped his head side to side and chewed on his cheek for a moment before he finally answered. “I wish I could have my mom back, but most of it...” Walter looked to his feet and turned away from Morgan, continuing through the room. Morgan glanced back at the bed for a moment to try to take it in before racing after Walter and taking his arm again to stop him.

“Most of it?” Morgan pushed.

“I would have liked the chance to choose.”

“You had more choice than any of us,” Morgan was quick to point out, but Walter only frowned at the words. Morgan held a little tighter to Walter’s arm and his knees went weak as Walter’s hand caressed over his. “Do you hate us?”

“No.” The word was sharp and fast.

“You just don’t like us.”

“Did I ever once say that?” Walter demanded in a soft voice, tone hurt and trying not to distract the people around them who were reading different plaques on what the room was.

“You didn’t need to,” Morgan said just as softly.

Walter rolled his eyes in annoyance. “Please, Morgan.” That was the first time he had been called his name on this trip. It wasn’t often that Walter used the name, and it made Morgan shift a little uncomfortably with how it was said. “I would never-”

“Leave us and forget about us?” Morgan whispered, looking down to where Walter’s hand was still gently placed over his own. Morgan’s hand just clutched even tighter to Walter’s arm as if Walter would blow away like smoke if Morgan so much as loosened the grip. “I’ve never seen you that way. For me, you are like this. You’ve always been like this.”

“How do you mean?”

Morgan licked his lips and the words that left his mouth made him cringe. They weren’t what he wanted to say, but there was no way he could say what was on his mind without the whole world spilling from his mouth and he wasn’t quite sure he was ready for such an admission.

“A humbly rich person.”

“What?” Walter snorted indignantly, calling some eyes to him at the volume he used.

Morgan’s eyes shut tightly, the heat from Walter’s grip almost unbearable. “Well...” Morgan exhaled sharply. “You have manners, knowledge-”

“Because of Hannibal.”

“But your talents and your aptitude and your strength and your bearing are you. That’s all you. Not father, not dad. You’re brilliant and kind and strong and funny and....” Morgan stole a glance up and immediately regretted meeting those eyes that were on him, bearing into him with an intensity like the sun. “That’s you.” The words were a weak whisper and Morgan was almost afraid that Walter would take them to mean that Morgan didn’t truly believe them. Instead, he was more surprised to see a blush fill Walter’s cheeks. “Wally-”

“Let’s go,” Walter whispered, pulling from Morgan’s grip softly.

“Where?”

“You’ll see.”

The rest of the grounds were absolutely as beautiful as the first two rooms. The attention to detail was breathtaking, but Walter was growing bored of all of the gold by the time they finally got to the gardens, and, despite the heat of the day, Morgan pulled him through all of it. The same stupid little smile on his lips through the entirety of it. The same smile that Walter had said he wanted to see on other people because who wouldn't want to see that stupid little excited smile every day of their lives?

The train ride back was hot and humid. There were more people on the return train home, so much so that Morgan was pressed up against Walter's side to make room for more people to sit on the benches. Eventually Morgan fell asleep against Walter, head leaning on Walter's shoulder and Walter couldn't blame the boy for wanting to escape the afternoon heat that was stifling and so abnormal for France.

Morgan's skin was blistering against Walter's, but he pushed the heat away and found his fingers playing with the dirty blonde locks that fell against pink tinged cheeks, something so picturesque about the lines in the boy's features. Youthful and angelic in their gentleness.

The train came to a stop and Walter pulled himself from his thoughts to glance around at the people trying to hurriedly remove themselves from the sauna box. Walter pushed Morgan from him unceremoniously and the boy jumped upright with a deep inhale.

"Come on, Einstein," Walter grumbled, scooting across the bench and out into the crowd of people. He waited for Morgan and Morgan stepped off and into the summer heat, sweat having already dampened his clothes. "Follow me."

Morgan raced after Walter's quick steps and looked over the man's damp t-shirt that seemed damper to one side and Morgan winced at the idea that he had been curled up into the man on the train. How badly must Walter have looked with some stupid little kid asleep against him.

Walter was silent as they wound their way through streets until they reached *Une Glace à Paris*, ordering for them in perfect French and Morgan couldn't stop the smile at the several scoops that were handed to him, piled high against Walter's single scoop.

"You know you can splurge sometimes," Morgan scolded with a grin as they left the shop. He licked up the stack, the silky flavors all gathering in one mix, hazelnut, coffee and chocolate greeting him. "Calories don't count when you're on vacation. Not that you need to worry about calories."

"What are you trying to say?" Walter asked with a smug smile and Morgan's grin dropped immediately and he dug back into his ice cream so that he didn't have to speak. "Oh, don't chicken out on me now. What were you trying to say?"

"You know damn well what I mean," Morgan muttered before he took another bit of ice cream into his mouth.

"I'm afraid I don't," Walter pushed, letting the chill of the ice cream fill his body, thankful that the heat of the sun wasn't nearly as bad now. Walter guided them back down the street smiling as Morgan tried to finish his ice cream before the larger serving melted all over his hands.

"Shut up," Morgan hissed. "You know that you're good looking."

“Am I?” Walter said, voice in its normal teasing lit that drove Morgan up a wall. “I mean, my girlfriend says so, but I-”

“You have a girlfriend.” Morgan whispered, feet coming to an abrupt halt and a frown on his face before he could stop it. There was a sharp pain in his chest that he couldn’t exactly name, and it nearly made him physically cry out. “Wh-When...” Morgan cleared his throat and looked away from Walter’s thoroughly concerned expression. “When did that happen?”

“Maybe a week or two ago. It’s fairly new.” The words were dull and monotone as they were said. They were said in politeness as an answer, though Morgan was sure that neither of them really wanted to continue in the conversation with the direction that it was going. “Einstein, you’re making a mess.”

Morgan’s heart stopped and his breathing was punched from his gut as Walter snatched up the hand that held his ice cream and a smoldering hot tongue trailed over his fingers, catching the line of melted cream. Morgan could only stare as Walter’s tongue slid up his fingers, up the cone before catching all three flavors on it.

“Wally,” Morgan breathed out, catching those maple eyes with his own only to find his own shock reflected at him. Walter cleared his throat and looked away, making his way to a trashcan to throw out the rest of his own ice cream. Morgan couldn’t exactly find it in himself to move though. His mouth was dry, and he could only stare.

“Are you finished with yours?” Walter asked with a weak voice. Morgan could only give a single nod and Walter took the cone from Morgan, adding it to the trash as well.

There was a tenseness in Walter’s body in a manner that he had never experienced before, and it sent a hot anger through him that immediately took away the cooling effects of the ice cream. He couldn’t understand exactly why he was angry when there was nothing wrong. Everything was absolutely perfect.

For the first time in months, he felt lighter with Morgan there, despite all the other friends he had. They weren’t Morgan. Walter wasn’t exactly sociable, but he could hold a conversation and it didn’t make him uncomfortable to be out in public, but he was not like Morgan. Morgan had never seemed to have an issue with commanding a room, so much like Hannibal in the sense, while all Walter was good at was mirroring Will.

And sociable or not, Walter had to admit that the only comfort he ever felt was with the kid’s company by his side. His support, the saucer to his teacup. Morgan was the strength, had always been Walter’s strength. Walter had always been the weak one between the two of them and he just had to accept the fact, but it was much easier to swallow with Morgan there.

There was something hot stirring in his gut and Walter did his best to push the familiar feeling away. Something that was so stupid and desperate that didn’t need to exist. Something that Walter didn’t want to exist. Something that would change everything he had carefully built. He wouldn’t let his feelings break him again. Never again.

“Wally?”

“What?” Walter asked absently, closing his eyes with a deep exhale as he was pulled from his thoughts.

“Where are you?” Morgan questioned, brows furrowed, and head tipped to the side.

“What?”

“You do the same thing that Dad does sometimes. You go inside your own head and then you disappear,” Morgan muttered, pointing to his temple.

“What are you talking about?” Walter asked, plastering a smile over his face. God, why was he so like Will? It was an inconvenience. It made everything so difficult. If he could just channel Hannibal occasionally, maybe he wouldn’t keep getting himself into such stupid messes.

“Please don’t do that.”

“Do what?” Walter gave an over-the-top shrug, smile still incredibly fake.

“Wally,” Morgan sighed, causing Walter’s smile to finally crumble. “You’ve been different since Germany, you know. You changed. You stopped being open with me.”

Walter found himself at a loss for words, something that only this annoying little kid seemed to be able to do to him. Walter sighed, a hand rubbing at his face as he tried to find an answer. How was he supposed to answer that? What was he supposed to tell Morgan? Morgan already knew exactly what Walter had gone through. Morgan had been there for all the nightmares that had been a result of it. Morgan had fallen victim to a few bloody noses when Walter hit him being woken from the terrors. Morgan had listened to his sobbing without a word of judgement.

"*Excusez-moi*!" a voice called. “*Pardon*!”

Walter’s hand snatched out and grabbed Morgan’s shirt, pulling the kid forward and into his chest as a man on a bike shot past them, nearly knocking into Morgan. “You ok?” Walter asked with worried eyes, voice a little breathless.

“Yes,” Morgan answered softly. Neither made any indication of movement, Morgan’s hands simply resting against Walter’s chest for balance and Walter’s arm around his waist, breathing matching perfectly. Morgan wasn’t sure how long they stayed like that, but however long it was wasn’t quite long enough.

“Let’s go. We have more to see before the day’s over,” Walter announced, releasing Morgan, and starting up the street.

“Where?” Morgan questioned, licking his dry lips as he tried to catch up. “Wally, you walk too fast. Wait.”

“You’re too short,” Walter teased, a lightness back to his voice. “Take bigger steps. And we’re going to Pere Lachaise.”

“Cool!” Morgan smiled openly and did his best to keep up the quick pace.

“Don’t you find things like that morbid?”

“Would you believe that I think they’re interesting?” Morgan asked back with a small shrug, all thoughts of their previous actions being filed away to look at more closely later when he had time to overthink every minute detail.

“Only you.”

“Oh please. You love that shit as much as I do. Admit it.”

Walter shrugged with a smile. “You swear a lot, you know that?”

“Father won’t let me swear. I have to write lines if I do.”

“Shame,” Walter taunted. “I think it’s kinda cute.”

“Cute?” Morgan nearly tripped over his own feet and smacked Walter at the grin the older wore.

“Someone as young as you trying to sound grown up by swearing.” They hit a main street and Walter’s attention jumped to the cars that were passing them and he stuck out an arm with a whistle, trying to hail a cab.

“I’m not a fucking kid, Wally.”

“See?” Walter chuckled, shooting Morgan a brilliant smile. “Adorable.”

“Shut up.”

After the second or third to pass them up, Walter grumbled with a roll of his eyes. “It’s a bit of a walk. Do you mind?”

“Not at all,” Morgan assured, making sure he was ready for the swift start from Walter, but none came.

The stroll was leisurely, and all the way Walter explained about the buildings that they passed. How old they were, what they were made from, some histories about them. Things that kept Morgan happily quiet, listening and letting all the information sink into him. It wasn’t often that he got to hear Walter spout off what he knew, figuring that Walter had never cared about such things. How wrong Morgan had been. How wrong Morgan wanted to keep being if he got to listen to Walter’s flustered excitement about the things around them.

“Are you sure you want to be a teacher?” Morgan finally asked as they reached the gates of the cemetery and stepped inside. Morgan meandered to a headstone and glanced over the weather worn rock that was nearly unreadable.

“Why do you ask?” Walter asked suspiciously behind him.

Morgan gave a shrug and moved along to the next grave to read over the name and dates that were written there. “You could be a good engineer or a historian. Or an artist if buildings aren’t something you want to draw. Your drawings are incredible. Have you considered other options?”

There was a sad little hum and Morgan stole a look at the man whose expression was conflicted. “Soccer player comes to mind,” Walter whispered. “I mean, I still have at least three or four more years of school before I can be a teacher. It might be an easy out. You know I’m not cut out for school.”

Morgan nodded, doing his best to bite back his anger at Walter’s idea. If Walter became famous, and he surely would, Walter was good at what he did, then Walter would only forget about Morgan that much more.

“Only three or four? Didn’t you just change your major?”

“I’ve gotten permission to take more credits. I’m getting a teaching license and a doctorate.”

Morgan frowned. “In what? Math?” There was a sharp huff of air from Morgan’s lungs, and he continued onto the next row of graves, trying to ignore the curiosity in the gaze on his back. “Have you ever considered being a lawyer?”

“No. Why?” Walter questioned, trying not to take special note of the anger and jealousy coming off the younger kid. When had Morgan become so hostile? What had Walter done to hurt this kid? All he had ever meant to do was protect him, keep him safe and happy. That was all Walter had ever really been good for to begin with.

“You have a rebuttal for everything father has to say and it’s so fucking easy for you to get away with murder.”

Walter paused and looked up, glancing around at the small number of people who were wandering the tombstones just like them. None of them were interested in their conversation, but that didn’t stop the feeling of being watched washing over and through Walter, as if the world knew exactly how much blood he had on his hands and stained into his skin. As if they knew exactly what he had done last weekend. What he had done and perfectly gotten away with while protecting the person he now called his girlfriend.

“Father taught me well,” Walter whispered, voice thick. Morgan glanced up curiously and Walter shook his head, pushing the memories away. “Chopin should be somewhere up here.” He pointed ahead of them, and both headed in that direction.

“I meant that you are good at skipping all the discipline and punishments. I couldn’t get away with half of the things you did and still do,” Morgan explained, hands sliding into his pockets. “And....”

“And?” Walter questioned.

They came to a stop in front of Chopin’s grave and Morgan was quiet for a moment as he looked over the grave. Marble with a beautiful sculpture of a woman, gated off and surrounded by pots of flowers.

“Wally?” Morgan didn’t dare look up. He kept his gaze firmly on the grave, readying himself for the explosion he was sure was coming.

“Yes?” The word was soft and much closer to Morgan than he thought it would be, still he didn’t look up.

“Who is Abigail?”

Morgan had heard the name before, seen the way it wounded when it was thrown around. The way that both of his parents fell silent and caved under it. The weapon that Walter proudly kept as a last resort when clawing tooth and nail got him nowhere.

Morgan finally looked over at Walter whose face was twisted into something that Morgan couldn’t name. It looked like Walter had been punched in the gut and was trying to stay standing. His words were raspy and broken when they left his mouth.

“Where did you hear that name?”

*From you* was the real answer, but Morgan thought it better to bring up a different line of conversation. Not a lie, but not the original text. “Father and Dad discussed Abigail and you.”

“Did they?” The words were spat bitterly, and Morgan bit his lip, wishing he could take back the way he had steered the conversation.

“Father said that he truly regretted her and...” Morgan looked up at a sharp inhale from Walter and he frowned. “He said that he missed you.”

“Does he?”

“Is it a girlfriend you had?”

There was a laugh from Walter, something cold and Walter shook his head. “No,” he clarified. “I’ve never met her. She is... Someone I fear and someone I hate.” Walter’s brow scrunched up as he spoke, looking a little confused by his own explanation. “Someone I longed to know, to truly understand and...” Walter trailed off.

“And?” Morgan asked softly.

“I am under the belief that I need to see and meet her in order to know if I am truly loved.” Walter gave another muddled laugh. Of course, Morgan would never understand.

“Can you meet her?”

“Not anymore,” Walter answered softly. Morgan tipped his head to the side and Walter sighed. “I know that you think that I don’t trust you and it’s not that. It’s not. I do trust you, Einstein, but... I wish I could know everything better before I plant an idea, a possibly very wrong idea, of something you do not need to be hurt by in your head.”

“Did she hurt you?” Morgan asked, following Walter who stepped away from the grave, his steps small and allowing Morgan the chance to get beside him.

“She took apart my family in an indirect way.” Walter sighed once more. “Before I got another shot with Father and Dad. “

Morgan frowned as he thought over the life that Walter was longing for. Something in the past. A mom and a dad. A normal life with sports and struggling to get by. Cheap food and beer. Repairing cars and fishing and camping on the weekends. Finishing high school and getting a job right away, skipping college all together. A wife and kids. Working hard until retirement and then maybe traveling here and there if there was a way to catch the game.

“You’ve never told me that.”

“And you’re not going to hear any more of it today,” Walter informed with a firm nod of his head. “But I promise that one day I will tell you.” There was a kind smile from Walter and Morgan shrunk.

“I’m not a kid, Wally. My age has nothing to do with this. You can tell me.”

“Look, Oscar Wilde.” Walter pointed to the gravestone, but Morgan stepped between them.

“Wally. It’s because of my age, isn’t it?”

“Mostly,” Walter agreed. “But when I tell you, you will know exactly why I waited.”

“She’s a trump card for you.”

“I do not use her much. Only when necessary.”

“See?” Morgan asked, letting a smile cover his lips in hopes of lightening the darkness that was in Walter’s eyes. “You could be a lawyer.”

“You could be a better one, Einstein.”

“No, I’m a doctor.” Morgan shook his head and let his hands take Walter’s arms.

“Are you?” Walter questioned, letting himself smile as well.

“Of course!” Morgan shot back before sheepishly lowering himself back to his feet, not noticing that he had risen to his tiptoes. “Nearly,” he corrected. “I just need to go to school for the license, but you know that I am more than ready to be a doctor. I could be a doctor right now if I wanted to.”

Walter felt a strange mixture of pride and envy at how well Morgan knew exactly what he was and what he wanted.

“What if you weren’t a doctor?”

Morgan gave a shrug, still holding Walter’s arms absentmindedly, thumbs caressing into the muscles there. “I guess I would have learned about investments. I suppose I should learn them anyway.”

“What? Why would you need to learn those?”

“I am a Verger,” Morgan pointed out lightly. “I might have been young when we were taken, but I remember at least that much.”

“You want to... go back?” Walter asked in astonishment, something catching Morgan off guard in Walter’s swiftly souring mood.

“I would love to,” Morgan admitted quietly. “You don’t want to?”

Walter frowned and Morgan bit his lip in discomfort, though he still didn’t remove his hands from Walter. Walter let out a deep breath. Why was he so upset? It wasn’t like he was around much, but the idea of Morgan being away and somehow further from his reach....

“You miss your house,” Walter decided, hoping it was enough of a truth that Morgan would cling to that instead of the pain that flushed through his blood. But even that made Walter’s jaw clench. Walter hated the idea of that house with Morgan as a little prince, in a life he could never be a part of.

“I’m always missing my home.” Morgan gave a little smile and Walter tried to bite back the idea that Morgan was trying to show off how much better he was than Walter. If Morgan missed anything, Walter couldn’t tell. If Morgan was sad, he played content. If he was broken, he

pretended to be in control and efficient. He was perfect, just what Hannibal and Will had always wanted.

Walter couldn't hold back the flood at the sudden realization that he was the one that was kept secret in all aspects of his life. He doubted that his parents spoke of him to their friends. He doubted that Morgan ever mentioned him. Why would they have any need for that? He was just some random disappointment that they had been more than glad to leave behind, granting his pleas to stay behind. Pleas that were easier to give into because then they could be rid of the letdown that was Walter Johnathan Graham.

Why did Morgan have to be so collected and content under any circumstances? That just fueled Walter's insecurity and he felt so small and insignificant next to Morgan. He was always insignificant next to Morgan.

"I'll go back one day," Morgan continued. "And I'll put my house back in order."

"I can't imagine you being very far from Father," Walter grumbled, eyes meeting a strong and concerned blue gaze.

"Why?" Morgan asked curiously, once more rising to his tiptoes. "I'm not his."

Walter's spike in jealousy hit him harshly and he silently swore and put himself back in order. "You and he have your own little world."

"And no one else is allowed to be there."

There was an odd connection between the two of them, an unspoken understanding as the truth settled into both.

"Yes," Walter agreed.

"You and dad are the same." Morgan gave a shrug, head tipping to the side with a smile that held a hint of dejection in it. "You share your own little world too, you know."

"Will?" Walter asked, shaking his head, and wanting nothing more than to walk away from the conversation, but Morgan's grip held him in place, mostly due to the fact that if he moved at all, Morgan would fall flat on his face from putting all of his balance on Walter.

"He is yours. I don't know how to explain it." Morgan rocked on his feet for a moment before returning to his tiptoes. "He will forever be yours. We don't have that connection. We won't ever have that connection. We just don't click like you two do."

"He loves you," Walter pointed out, offense in his voice.

"Yes, but still..."

"Still what?"

Morgan finally lowered himself and released Walter's arms, turning to look at the author's grave for a moment. "I don't belong like you do." The words were thoughtful, gentle. "You fit them so perfectly like you were always meant to be their son."

"Morgan-"

“You left and without you, I became the center of attention.” Morgan gave a light laugh, a hand brushing through his sweat damp waves. “If you weren’t gone...” *You would have been the center of all our attention,* was what Morgan meant to say, but he couldn’t bring himself to finish the sentence and he let Walter interrupt him.

“I know you felt like I left you, I just... I needed to...” Walter groaned, and Morgan turned back to find a frustrated looking Walter, both hands to his head as he leaned back to look at the sky that was a bright blue without a single cloud in sight.

“Be yourself,” Morgan offered. “Before all the madness we’ve been through since the day we became brothers could consume you. I know.” Morgan stepped closer, taking Walter’s hands in his and pulling them from hair that was far softer than Morgan thought it would be.

“The thing is...” Walter sighed, and his head dropped as fingers slowly, cautiously, hesitantly tangled with his. Walter’s eyes slid closed, and he allowed the closeness between them to sink into his skin. A closeness that he hadn’t realized he had missed as much as he did. It felt good to have someone to finally talk to, someone to understand. “I believe that this is my better self.”

“Without us?” Morgan asked in a whisper. “And with us?”

“I would just be... a shell of me.”

“Would that be so bad...?” *If you were still with me?* The sentence once more died on Morgan’s tongue.

“There is nothing bad about seeking your best self. Were there any more graves you wanted to see? I know that Jim Morrison is somewhere in here."

"Who?"

Walter gave a laugh and ruffled at Morgan's hair. "The Doors. God, we need to make you listen to real music. Not that shit Father makes us sit through. Come on."

The walk back to the city was long and hot, but both boys rather enjoyed the length of their time together, though neither would admit it.

It was nice to have that missing piece back. A piece that had been so perfectly carved out for one another as a means of survival and then as a means of family and now... Whatever this was between them. Something that both absolutely did not have a name for.

Their conversations were profound and deep, something that felt normal in a way that it never did around Walter's friends.

Of course, Walter could talk to them, but never as he spoke with Morgan. Everything was so relaxed and comfortable and honest, even if it was painful and depressing. These were not like his daily conversations. He could never speak freely, only half truths that Walter knew should truly be considered complete lies.

And he knew better of the people he socialized with too. He had been taught to watch everything around him and note each individual detail exactly to be used back if a time came with it.

They all tried to be more real than they were, as real as Grant Walter Foster was. But Morgan was different. Morgan was just there, being himself, so natural in everything. As real as Ezra was.

"Oh," Morgan's voice said, stopping mid-sentence as he pointed to something. "Look, Wally." Morgan broke from Walter's side and rushed into a nearby store.

"Einstein! Wait!" Walter called, following the boy. But the boy didn't so much as hear him, leaving Walter to feel like he was interrupting something between Morgan and his own soul. It sent twinges of jealousy through Walter as he wound his way through bookshelves stuffed full to bursting with books after a mop of dirty blond waves.

When Walter finally caught up, Morgan's eyes were lost in the many beautiful, old books and Walter watched as Morgan's fingers delicately stroked and caressed all of them with reverence and love.

*"Le Petit Prince"*, Morgan whispered, the titles flowing from his lips so effortlessly it made Walter want to continue the rest of their conversations that day in French. "*Les Misérables."* There was a snap and excited gasp. *"Madame Bovary."* There it was. Walter stared as Morgan's blue eyes sparkled at the book and Morgan pulled it free. Walter blinked, eyes flickering between Morgan and the book that had captured Morgan´s heart. "*Rymes de gentile et vertueuse dame Pernette Du Guillet,* of Maurice Sceve," Morgan whispered. (Rhymes of the Kind and Virtuous Lady Pernette Du Guillet, of Maurice Sceve.)

Walter stepped a little closer, looking over the boy's shoulder as Morgan flipped the book open, head tipping to the side at something carefully written into it.

*Mon cher Bastian,*

*Si un jour tu voulais me rencontrer et que tu voulais me trouver, regarde ici. Je sais que je me cache dans les mots de quelqu'un d'autre. Que sans me connaître il m'a touché et a vu ce que tu es pour moi.*

*J'attends toujours, Emma.*

*(My dear Bastian,*

*If one day you wanted to meet me and you wanted to find me, look here. I know I'm hiding in someone else's words. That without knowing me, he touched me and saw what you are for me.*

*I'm still waiting, Emma.)*

"Was she lost?" Walter asked with a bored little huff of air and a roll of his eyes. Morgan's annoyed scrunch of his nose made Walter freeze.

"No," Morgan answered with firm confidence. "She was exactly where she wanted to be."

"Which was where, Einstein?"

"Waiting for him." The words were strong, but the air that settled between them was fragile and shimmering, quickly broken by Walter being accidentally shoved forward from someone scuttling past them.

"Pardon," a small voice said, and Walter waved away the apology, quickly turning to assess Morgan who had all but been slammed up against the bookcase.

"Why would she wait for someone who obviously didn't believe she was worthy of his time?" Walter questioned, straightening up Morgan and fixing the collar that had long since been unbuttoned due to the heat. "He obviously didn't understand her."

"Because," Morgan said with a small sigh, looking over the written words again. "These words sing in her heart that she belongs to him."

"So? She can find another person. My mom did all the time."

"Those words would mean nothing to someone else." Morgan's fingers gently slid over the words as if trying to feel them etched into the page.

Walter bit his lip as amazement twisted at his stomach, something making him sick. His eyes wandered over Morgan's features. Skin pale, save for the rose in his cheeks from the heat. Blue eyes locked lovingly on the book, pink lips mouthing the words left there by a lover. And that damned scent of strawberries once more plaguing his nose from how close he was still shoved up against Morgan from the woman who had bumped them earlier.

"*Si un jour tu voulais me rencontrer et que tu voulais me trouver, regarde ici*," Morgan whispered, French once more stunning as it fell from his tongue. "Let me see if I can buy it." (If one day you wanted to meet me and you wanted to find me, look here.)

"No, let me," Walter muttered, hand reaching over Morgan's shoulder to take the book. Morgan glanced back at Walter and the distance between them made Walter pause, a constricting in his chest. He chalantly ripped the book from Morgan's hands and briskly headed for the front of the store to find the clerk.

"Wally, I have money," Morgan complained as he followed Walter, nearly tripping over the people around him. He stopped beside Walter at the desk and tried to still Walter's hand as he reached for his wallet. "And you paid for the ice cream."

"Please. You should be used to being spoiled by now." Walter handed the cash to the clerk and let the book be bagged up before he passed it over to Morgan. "Think of it as a late birthday present."

"My birthday was a month ago and you already got me-"

"Einstein," Walter moaned, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Stop being so damn difficult, will ya? I'm just trying to do something nice for ya. Why do you always have to ruin it?"

"I-I-I-" Morgan stuttered and Walter looked up, afraid he had broken the kid. "I-I-"

"Oh, my God. Spit it out kid," Walter instructed, a hint of a smile on his lips.

"Thank you," Morgan finally settled on, eyes on his feet and feeling incredibly small. "I..." His hand tucked a lock of hair behind his ear. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." Walter ruffled at Morgan's hair and grinned. "Let's get out of the way. Other people want to buy things too."

The quaint shop was left behind, the book tucked securely against Morgan's chest as they made their way through more Parisian streets, sweat dripping down their backs, doing nothing to cool them.

Not until a giant, dark glass pyramid came into view and Morgan dropped the book. It caught in the bag that was on his wrist, otherwise it would have tumbled to the gravel ground beneath their feet.

Walter stopped and turned back with a chuckle. "You know, you keep stopping on the outside of these places. The inside is much better."

"It's the Louvre," Morgan muttered, blinking at the massive building that he wished he had years to spend in.

Walter's brow furrowed and he turned back to the building, a hand over his eyes to shield from the sun. "It is? How could you possibly tell?"

"Wally, we need to see the Mona Lisa," Morgan said, snatching up Walter's hand and dragging him through the crowds of tourists that all looked as miserably hot as they both felt.

"It's not as impressive as you think it is," Walter warned, trying to slow down the aggressive tug against his arm. He gave a laugh at the dark look Morgan shot him.

"You know damn well that da Vinci is my favorite," Morgan hissed through his lips, desperately trying to get Walter to stop dragging his feet purposefully. "I don't care how small the painting is or if it's faded or I have to wait until closing to see it, we are going to see it."

"Ok, ok," Walter laughed deeply, tugging back on Morgan's hand with much more strength than what Morgan possessed. Morgan whipped around, stumbling. "Chill, alright? I promise we will see the Mona Lisa. We still need to buy tickets. She'll still be there with her creepy little smile in ten minutes."

"Walter," Morgan pouted, bouncing up and down and shaking Walter's hand, tugging on it once more. "Hurry."

Walter made a show of rolling his eyes. "God, you're a child. What on earth do Dad and Father do with you?"

"They give me what I want when I want it. Wally!" Another futile tug. "Please, Walter. Stop being a dick."

Walter couldn't stop the scoff that exited through his nose, and he leaned over with a laugh. "I'm being a dick? You're such a fucking spoiled princess." He wheezed as he straightened himself up. "Why do I put up with you?"

"You have to," Morgan answered. "Can we please go in now?"

Walter shook his head and looked over the building. "I think I get why you always stop outside," Walter said, his sarcasm strong and Morgan just bounced at his side with another tug of his arm. "It is quite pretty, isn't it? Did you know that the *Pyramide du Louvre* was built in-"

"1989 and designed by Chinese-American architect I. M. Pei," Morgan interrupted impatiently. "I know, I know, I know!"

"Spoiled-"

"-Please-"

"-Little-"

"-Wally-"

"Princess."

"I am going to break your wrist if we do not go in there right now," Morgan hissed, though his face was simply pleading despite the harshness of the words.

"You wouldn't," Walter snorted.

"Try me."

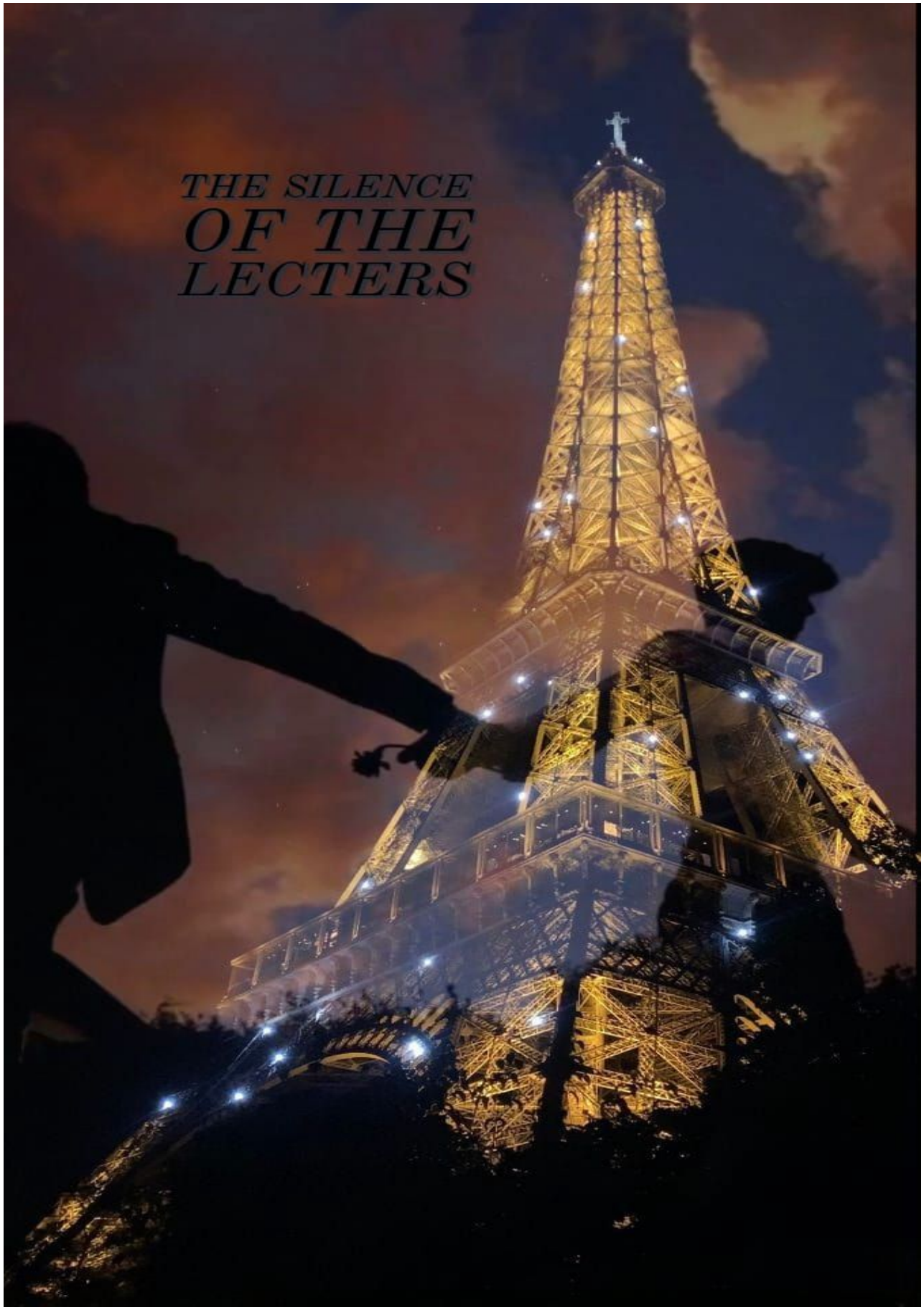
Walter was silent for a moment, weighing his options and at another impatient tug on his hand, he sighed, shocking Morgan with the gentleness of his smile.

"Alright. Come on." Walter nodded his head towards the glass structure and Morgan beamed, dragging Walter along once more.

# Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Walter dropped down to his knees beside Morgan and leaned over to whisper in the boy's ear. "You touch that, I will punish you and I promise it will be far worse than anything Father could come up with."


THE SILENCE
OF THE
LECTERS

"It's so small," Morgan announced slowly as they stepped in front of the Mona Lisa. It was hidden behind a thick wall of glass that was circled by velvet ropes to block it off, mounted on a single portion of a wall in the middle of a ginormous room that had other much more detailed pieces of art on floor to ceiling canvases.

"I told you," Walter pointed out, shoving his hands into his jean pockets, and looking around the room, eyes stopping on a rather lovely painting of a young woman and a wonderfully brushed shade of blue. He started towards it, but Morgan's hand on his abdomen stopped him. Morgan's eyes didn't break contact with the da Vinci though.

"Stay here a bit longer, please."

"I was just-"

"This is one of my favorites by him," Morgan whispered, voice basically lost in the whispers from other tourists crowded around the single painting, all others in the room forgotten. "Please stay and look at it with me."

Morgan's hand dropped from Walter's muscles the moment he realized where his hand was resting. He heard an annoyed little breath, but Walter obeyed, turning back to the painting.

People around them came and went for several long moments, maybe an hour or two before Morgan inhaled deeply and turned to Walter.

"Which one's your favorite?"

The barest of smiles covered Walter's face and he simply turned away without a word and Morgan raced to catch up with him. Morgan followed him through what felt like millions of endless hallways decorated floor to ceiling in artwork that he tried to appreciate before having to run once more to catch up with Walter's long strides.

"What is it called?" Morgan asked as they once more stopped for Walter to check a map of the building.

"The Coronation of Napoleon," Walter replied, starting off again before Morgan had a chance to gather himself.

"By whom?"

"Jacques-Louis David."

"I don't recognize the name?"

Walter rounded sharply and Morgan crashed into Walter, stumbling backwards. "What do you mean you don't- how could you- you don't..." Walter closed his eyes in a pained way, his shocked stuttering falling silent. "He did Napoleon Cross the Alps." Walter looked up only to find confusion over Morgan's features and the boy shook his head. Walter blinked. How had Hannibal never shown the kid any of David's work? It was perfect in every detail. "The Intervention of the Sabine Women," Walter tried again, only getting the same little shake of his head. Walter groaned irritated. "Leonidas at Thermopylae." Another shake. "What do I call you Einstein for, Einstein? Portrait of Madame Récamier?"

"Oh!" Morgan said with a nod of his head, though there was still a question on his brow. "I thought that was by François Gérard."

Walter rolled his eyes and took Morgan's arm, tugging the boy along. "You're impossible. I feel like you do this to me on purpose."

"Sometimes," Morgan answered with a smile. "But I really don't know who you're talking about this time."

"You'd know his artwork if you saw it," Walter assured. "Especially The Intervention of the Sabine Women."

They made a few more rounds and twists and turns before they came to stand in front of a massive painting that stretched the length of a wall, covered in magnificent reds, blues, and golds.

"Look at the robes on Josephine de Beauharnais," Walter instructed in a whisper in Morgan's ear. "He had to have used real fur to make her robes."

Walter pressed softly at the small of Morgan's back, moving him closer to the portrait. Morgan did his best to hide the blush creeping over his cheeks and he did as Walter asked. His eyes hovered over the kneeling woman's robes, and he looked over the carefully painted fur. Walter hadn't been lying. The fur looked like it had come right off an animal and had been glued to the canvas. The blue carpet on the stairs was actual carpet and the jewels on the crown were one hundred percent real. He glanced over his shoulder to where Walter had taken a seat on a bench, facing the painting with a content gaze.

"Why does the pope look so weird?" Morgan asked, leaving the painting to come sit beside Walter. Walter looked over him for a moment before he turned his attention back to the painting with a funny little smile.

"He's fucking pissed Einstein," Walter explained, smile growing, and he gave a small laugh. "Napoleon is crowning his wife and himself as the Emperor and Empress of France. His crowning himself shows that the church is no longer above the king. Kingdom is no longer a god appointed, given right. It belongs to man and man doesn't need to listen to the church." There was another laugh. "Just as well though. Religion is bullshit."

"I agree with you, but what about this painting makes you say that?" Morgan asked, looking over Walter's strong features.

"Do you really not know anything about history?" Walter asked in disbelief, though his eyes stayed on the painting. "For everything you do know-"

"I try to avoid things related to religion," Morgan explained. "It's too complicated to make sense of, and none of it is probable or logical. It's fiction. Someone no one knows anymore but is either rolling in their grave or laughing from how his trick is still being believed thousands of years after it was made."

Walter snickered at the words. "The catholic church had three popes at one time. It was called the Western Schism. They all excommunicated each other and ruled from 1378 to 1417."

Morgan laughed and Walter's eyes jumped from the painting and to the boy whose laugh echoed around the hall, calling eyes once more to them. "They excommunicated each other?" There was a

snort and Morgan's hand covered his mouth and Walter bit his lip to keep from smiling.

"You've never snorted before," Walter muttered, watching the blush go all the way to Morgan's hairline as he hid behind his hands. "When did you start snorting when you laugh?"

"Always. I try not to show it," Morgan replied, voice muffled behind his hands as he still laughed. There was another snort and Walter chuckled, smiling brightly. "Shut up."

"I didn't say anything," Walter said, something strangled in his tone.

"You're thinking something."

"I sure hope I am. I'd be dead otherwise, Einstein."

"Oh my god, shut up." But another snort only made Walter laugh again.

"It's not that funny, Einstein," Walter said, sitting up a little more and reaching out to ruffle Morgan's hair. Morgan only leaned over.

"I'm embarrassed. Fuck you."

"You're adorable, Einstein," The grip in Morgan's hair pulled the boy's blushed face from his hands. "Can we stay here for a bit more? I love this painting." Morgan gave a nod and Walter's smile softened. He ruffled once more at Morgan's waves and turned his attention back to the painting, hand dropping to his side on the bench.

The hours ticked by in a quiet silence between the two of them, each staring at the art, though Morgan couldn't keep his eyes off the real art that was beside him instead of the stolen moments of history in front of him.

His eyes lingered on the man that was so lost in his mind, just as he always was. It was so difficult to keep Walter present. The only time he was still was when he was locked away in his head. The place that Morgan didn't want him to be, save for at this moment. This moment was perfect enough to allow Morgan a few stolen moments that he hardly ever got to look over Walter.

"Wally?" Morgan asked softly after a moment. Walter didn't acknowledge him, and Morgan looked back to the painting for a moment before reaching out and touching Walter's shoulder. "Wally?" Walter blinked several times, coming back to himself. He glanced over to Morgan with a questioning look. "Can..." Morgan looked nearly guilty. "Can we get something to eat? I'm getting hungry."

"I'm sorry. I did it again, huh?" Walter stretched his hands over his head and stretched before rubbing his eyes.

"Where do you go when you do that?" Morgan got to his feet and Walter followed.

"Uh... it depends on what I'm thinking of," Walter explained with a shrug. "I was in that painting this time. Watching the coronation."

"How do you do that?" Morgan tipped his head to the side curiously. "I don't think I could imagine things like you can."

“I...” Walter ran a hand through his hair. “I guess it’s something that Dad taught me. He taught us how to use empathy, right?”

“Right,” Morgan whispered. “I’ve never been very good at opening myself up like that.”

“I guess I just... trying to put myself there. Be each person in the painting, see what it’s like. It was the only way that I could make father’s lessons something to sit through. Drawing helped. I’m not sure how else to explain it.”

The heat outside was blistering and both boys nearly wilted under the sun. “Of course, the weekend we pick to go out there’s a heat wave,” Walter grumbled, heading out towards the street to hail a cab. He wasn’t about to walk to their next location.

“How do you think Father is fairing?” Morgan asked and Walter laughed at the thought of the man in his suit, sweating in the afternoon heat.

“Not good, Einstein.”

A cab finally stopped, and both climbed in, the driver looking downhearted and sweaty. Walter gave instructions and both sat back, letting the hot wind from the outside world into the car through the windows.

Walter watched Morgan from the back seat, the boy leaned against the side of the window, waves blowing in the wind. He looked like he was nearly asleep until they entered a roundabout and Walter couldn’t stop smiling when Morgan sat up straight with that stupid little smile on his lips. He glanced back at Walter before his attention returned to the Arc de Triomphe.

The kid’s expressions had been all that Walter had wanted to see. Walter couldn't care less about what they were seeing. It was dull and he had seen them all multiple times before. But Morgan was far more entertaining and enlightening than any landmark they could possibly see.

The city was hot and muggy, but that smile made Walter forget about the sweat that ran down the back of his legs. They circled the marble arch several times before they finally left the roundabout and then found themselves outside of Notre Dame.

Walter let Morgan come to a stop outside of the cathedral to look at it. Walter kept his stroll slow for Morgan to catch up. He walked through a large gathering of pigeons and into the shade of several trees before turning back to look at Morgan who still stood dumbstruck out by the street, book still on his wrist.

"Einstein?" Walter called with a light smile. "Are you coming?"

"One moment," Morgan's voice replied, almost lost among the crowds of people around them and the coo of the birds that had once more settled so people could feed them.

Walter tipped his head to the side with a fond little look, allowing Morgan as much time as he needed to take in the building.

"Did you know," Morgan said, snapping back to himself and following Walter, "that there was supposed to be a swimming pool built into the roof?"

"I did not." Walter let his arm sling around Morgan's shoulders, and he guided Morgan towards a line of people waiting to get through a police line at a metal gate put up around the church. At Morgan's odd look, Walter took pity on him. "You have to be dressed appropriately to enter the church." Morgan glanced up at Walter and did his best to ignore the way that Walter's eyes trailed over his body slowly. "You should be fine."

Morgan let his body be pulled into the line and ignored the heat of the day to enjoy the way that Walter's arm felt around his shoulders.

They were let into the cathedral and the change in temperature was immediately welcome. Both sighed and took a seat in one of the pews, letting the coldness of the stone enclosure soothe their heated skin.

Morgan closed his eyes, listening to the organ that was playing and echoing about, enjoying the way that Walter's fingers played with the hair at the nape of his neck.

Morgan couldn't help but sink into Walter's side, the scent of sweat so normal on Walter's skin from his years of workouts and soccer games, something so relaxing about the smell of a soccer pitch and hard work.

"Let me know when you're ready to go. There's this really good place for dinner that you need to try," Walter muttered and Morgan shivered as Walter's nose nuzzled against his temple as Walter rested his head against Morgan's.

"Alright," Morgan whispered with a small nod, resting further against Walter who only tugged Morgan closer, fingers once more in Morgan's hair. "Wally?"

"Yes, Einstein?"

"Have you missed me?"

There was a slight silence, but there was nothing tense about it. It was more thoughtful, and Morgan's heart stuttered in his chest at a nod from Walter against his head.

"Yes," was breathed out in Morgan's ear. "Of course, I've missed you. You're my best friend."

"Brother?"

A shake of his head. "Not my brother," Walter corrected. "Bother isn't a good term for what we are."

"What are we?" Morgan asked softly.

"Closer," Walter whispered. "We are closer than family." It was true. Normal families weren't usually taught to struggle until they learned to strive and blossom under any circumstance and, at the same time, care for each other with love. And there was not a word for that. It was what it was. Just Walter and Morgan, the family of Hannibal and Will. "We define category."

The silence fell once more between them and once more time ticked by. They didn't need to worry about time. They had all the time in the world if they wanted it. They didn't have to worry about anything or anyone around them. They were perfectly happy right where they were, and the world could spin on without them and neither of them would care.

There was a low grumble that interrupted them, and Walter laughed, pulling away from Morgan who gave an embarrassed smile, a hand to his stomach.

"Let's get some food," Walter said with a smiling shake of his head. "You must be starving."

"Sorry," Morgan whispered, following Walter from the bench for a slow single walk around the cathedral to look at it. They stopped momentarily at the large rose windows and Morgan once more had that stupid smile on his lips.

Another cab ride and Morgan found himself in front of the Eiffel Tower. The metal frame twisted and turned upwards into the sky, sunflowers at the base, all of the golden blooms chasing the sun that was finally starting to lower in the distance.

"Is everything here so beautiful?"

Walter glanced up from paying for the cab and his eyes fell on Morgan who was outlined in a golden light from the setting sun. "Yes," he answered, the word leaving him before he could pull it back and he hoped the color in his cheeks passed off as heat instead of his embarrassment.

Morgan just turned back with a blinding, heart stopping smile and Walter's mouth went dry.

"Where were we going to eat?" Morgan asked, making his way back over to Walter, a hand reaching out to take Walter's hand, fingers trailing over the muscle in Walter's forearm before lacing with his fingers. "I'm dying."

Walter closed his eyes with a steadying breath, and he was met with a clear and joyful blue gaze when he opened his eyes.

"Come with me," Walter answered weakly, voice cracking. He pulled Morgan along with him and around the metal structure and to where a large field lay out. There were groups of people eating on blankets, children playing games and further back, beyond the field, there were more children playing in a fountain in an attempt to cool off.

Walter led them to a small stand that was selling what looked like fair food and Morgan rolled his eyes. Of course, Walter would want something cheap. It wasn't until Walter paid that Morgan stared at the soft pretzels, meats and cheeses that cost a ridiculous amount that left Morgan speechless.

Walter led them back to the field and glanced around at the ground that was covered in beer bottle caps that left nowhere for them to really sit. Walter set his food down and stripped his shirt over his head, resting it over the ground before sitting over the bottle caps and taking a sip of his own bottle of cool beer.

Morgan blinked several times before slowly lowering himself into Walter's t-shirt. He did his best to not stare at the ridiculous amount of bruising that covered Walter’s torso. Some were yellowing and older and some new and fresh, deep blues and purples. Walter didn’t seem to notice the bruising or perhaps had forgotten about it, so Morgan did the same.

"Thank you," Morgan said, breaking apart a piece of his pretzel before placing it in his mouth.

"You're welcome." Walter reached out and took a piece of prosciutto and gouda and shoved it into his mouth before downing it with another swig of beer.

"What does that taste like?" Morgan questioned, pointing to the beer in Walter's hand before eating a slice of *Coppa de Corse*.

"You wouldn't like it, Einstein," Walter said in a sure tone that made Morgan frown.

"Can I try-"

"Absolutely not." Walter shook his head, free hand reaching out to mess up Morgan's long ago ungelled hair. "Good try, but you know father would absolutely have my head if he so much as got a whiff of alcohol on you."

Morgan pouted, taking a sip of his lemonade instead and looking back towards the tower. They were quiet for a moment, eating until a ball rolled towards them and hit Walter's knee.

"*Par ici*!" (This way!) a young boy's voice called and Morgan glanced up to find a kid with bleach blond hair racing over to them. "*Passer le ballon*." (Pass the ball.)

A grin split across Walter's face, and he got to his feet, tucking his foot under the ball. He flicked his foot and the ball jumped on command up into his hands.

Morgan gave a small smile as he watched Walter take a few steps back, holding out the ball with a straight arm. He took a few running steps, let the ball drop, and kicked it.

It flew incredibly high, but not far. Right to the blond child, just as Walter wanted it to.

"There's a reason you got a scholarship," Morgan said, taking another bite of the pretzel.

Walter gave an embarrassed chuckle and ran a hand through his hair with a small shrug.

"Whoa!" the kid said after he had chased down the ball. "*Voulez-vous jouer avec nous*?" (Do you want to play with us?)

Walter's grin dropped and he glanced over at Morgan as if asking permission. Morgan rolled his eyes with a snort and a smile.

"Go on," Morgan approved, waving Walter away.

"*Oui. Un instant s'il vous plaît*," (Yes. One moment please,) Walter called back to the boy. He turned back to Morgan, an index finger pointed at Morgan. "Do not touch that beer."

"Well, I wasn't going to, but now I want to," Morgan teased.

Walter dropped down to his knees beside Morgan and leaned over to whisper in the boy's ear. "You touch that, I will punish you and I promise it will be far worse than anything Father could come up with." Walter got back to his feet and raced after the kid who passed the ball to Walter who stopped it expertly.

Morgan did his best to keep his heart beating steadily in his chest, as the words did something funny in his stomach. It twisted into knots and rose into his chest making it hard to breathe.

There had been no threat in Walter's words. Not a real threat. It was more a promise of something that Morgan almost wanted to see happen. He was curious where it was going to lead.

Morgan finished his food and pulled his new book out, looking over the written message in the cover before settling himself in to read, but he couldn't quite focus.

Not when French was being called out by a voice that spoke it so effortlessly that it might as well have been Walter's first language. Not when talented limbs did exactly what they did best, holding ultimate control over an unruly object. Not when a man looked as beautiful as he did in his natural element that he was born into.

Walter raced over and Morgan picked up his beer, holding it out to Walter, whose hands were over his head as he breathed hard, body slick with sweat. “Little buggers keep ya on your toes,” he said with that stupid half smile he liked to wear. He took the outheld drink, put some in his mouth and swished it around before spitting it out. He took another drink, this time swallowing it. His eyes dropped down to Morgan and that half smile turned cocky. “You, uh, enjoying your book?”

Morgan tore his eyes from Walter and shook his head. “Uh, yeah. Oh, yeah,” Morgan answered quickly, voice thick. Walter chuckled. “You know how I am with poetry.”

“You look a little flushed, Einstein.” Walter lowered himself back onto his knees and held out the beer. Morgan looked over the cold bottle that had condensation on it. “Did you drink any of this?”

“No,” Morgan whispered with a small shake of his head.

“Good boy,” Walter said, that smile stealing the breath from Morgan’s lungs in a way that he wasn’t sure he had ever experienced before. He stared at those buttery eyes and there was a strange little tug in his gut, and he licked his lips. Walter’s eyes followed the movement before he mirrored it unconsciously. “So obedient,” Walter continued softly, words leaving him without permission. His hand reached out and Morgan waited for fingers to grace his cheek, but they didn’t come.

“*Vouliez-vous toujours jouer?*” (Did you still want to play?) the kid’s voice called and Walter quickly dropped his hand, a smile covering his lips.

“*Non, merci,” (No, thanks,)* Walter called back, shooting that smile to the kid before turning back to Morgan. “You don’t mind heights, do you?” Morgan shook his head. “Good. We have quite aways up to go, don’t we?” Walter made a show of looking up at the Eiffel Tower and Morgan smiled in disbelief. “Though, I can’t say I’m fond of heights after falling into that pit. You’ll make sure to protect me, right?” Morgan’s face cracked into a smile, and he shook his head.

“Of course.” Morgan nodded and closed his book. “What else am I good for?”

“You’re perfect as you are and good for anything you set your mind to, Morgan,” Walter assured, once more using Morgan’s name. It felt odd coming from Walter’s lips, but it wasn’t unpleasant in the slightest. In fact, Morgan found that he enjoyed the way his name sounded in that voice that he had grown up listening to at night. Read him to sleep. Sometimes it would sing. Sometimes tell him stories about going camping or seeing a baseball game. Odds and ends, but anything that that voice said Morgan had always clung to. “You ready?”

“Yes!” Morgan answered excitedly, getting to his feet, and holding out Walter’s shirt to him, still unsaying of the markings across the elder’s skin. Walter took it back with a grateful nod and pulled it over his head before picking up their trash and heading towards a trash can. Walter had Morgan get in line and disappeared for a moment before returning with a bag on his wrist.

Up they climbed. Stairs and stairs and more stairs in that god awful heat, hair damp and sticking to foreheads. Breathing puffs of sauna like air through open mouths. And finally at the top of the stairs, Walter paid for the lifts, and they started going up once more.

Walter stayed to the very center of the lift and watched as Morgan pressed himself to the side, looking through the glass and around them at the bolted metal and the large pulleys that would be helping them up to the top.

The lift creaked as it continued to move upwards, and Morgan bounced slightly as they made their way into a space where he could see. See for miles and miles across the city that stretched on for years. Built across generations. Breathless history all laid out for Morgan to see. But the person he wanted to share it with was nowhere near him.

He turned back to find Walter huddled around himself in the very center of the cart, among the others inside it, despite how hot the bodies must have been. Morgan's smile fell and he glanced once more out of the elevator before moving carefully through the people and to where Walter stood.

"You weren't kidding, were you?" Morgan asked softly, a hand taking one of Walter's forearms that were over his chest. "You really are afraid of heights, aren't you?" Walter shook his head with a snort of laughter, but it was fake. So incredibly fake that Morgan frowned. "Wally, please come look with me."

"I'm fine right here," Walter whispered, voice low as his head fell forward.

"Wally, I'll protect you," Morgan said, calling those frightened toffee eyes to him. "You're perfectly safe when you're with me."

"Safe," Walter repeated with a slight shake of his head.

"Safe," Morgan agreed, rising to his tiptoes to be near Walter's ear. "I could kill everyone in this room for you without issue. I can assist you with any medical ailment that befalls you if something happens. Nothing and no one in here is going to hurt you. Come with me. Experience this with me." Morgan pulled on Walter's arm and excused their way over to the edge of the elevator. Walter kept his head down and only held to himself a little more and Morgan would be a fool to not notice the way that Walter's breathing caught, and his body went rigid. "Look, Wally. It's beautiful," Morgan once more coaxed, a hand reaching out to tip Walter's chin up.

Morgan kept close to Walter, hand not leaving Walter's arm as Walter slowly came to stand beside him, huddled closely to Morgan. His eyes flickered wearily across the city as they continued to move upwards. His lip was tugged between his teeth, and he shifted his weight nervously.

"Acrophobia is the most common phobia. Up to five percent of the population suffers from it," Morgan muttered, fingers gliding over Walter's arm and watching his face carefully. Walter closed his eyes tightly as the elevator stuttered to a stop, loud with the creaking of metal. "You know that you could work with Father to get over it. It's curable."

"I don't know if I..." Walter let out a deep and shuttering breath before he opened his eyes once more. "I don't know if I can face this yet."

"You've come this far."

“My knees are going to buckle,” Walter gasped out, head once more falling forward. “There are stairs that lead up to the fenced off deck. I’ll meet you at the bottom.”

“No,” Morgan shot back with a frown. “You did not come all the way up here to go back down without seeing what the city looks like from the top. You brought me up here for a reason. Come on.”

Morgan pulled Walter from the elevator and up the stairs that Walter indicated until they were surrounded by a mesh wire cage that gave way to the city below them. Walter stayed towards the wall, but Morgan carefully eased him towards the railing and fencing.

“Look, Wally,” Morgan said, lightly tugging on Walter’s arm, while pointing out in front of them. “There’s a soccer pitch next to the Seine. I miss watching you play.”

“You do?” Walter’s weak voice asked beside him, body shaking as he edged closer to the railing.

“Yeah. It was just us, remember?” Morgan smiled and rested his head against Walter’s bicep, nuzzling into the muscle. “And then you would take us out to eat after all your games were done. Stupid places like hot dog stands, but if we were together then it was fine.”

“You didn’t like the snack shack at the field?”

Morgan’s face twisted into dislike, and he shook his head. “It’s all processed and plastic. But it made you happy.”

“I guess you can rip an American kid from the US, but you can’t make him like caviar and figs.”

“Caviar is gross,” Morgan grumbled, and Walter gave a relaxed laugh, a hand catching Morgan’s to stop how it continued to trail over his arm, sending goosebumps across his skin. Morgan gave a confused look.

“The view on the other side has the sunset. Let’s go watch it,” Walter explained softly, turning away from Morgan to follow the circular path, though he once more made his way for the center wall to be as far away from the edge as he possibly could. They pressed through people until they found themselves on the opposite side and Morgan sighed as he looked over the city, the sky the same color as the orange cream that his father would sometimes make for dessert.

“It’s beautiful,” Morgan whispered, leaning against the railing. He could feel Walter’s eyes trapped on him, but he didn’t exactly mind. And he knew that it was most likely so that Walter didn’t have to focus on how high up they were.

“Yes,” Walter whispered, and Morgan froze. That was the same voice Walter had used earlier when they had arrived at the landmark and Morgan had to force himself to try not to analyze it and break it apart bit by bit. “It’s breathtaking.”

Morgan tried his best to ignore the way that Walter’s hand rested against the small of his back. Morgan closed his eyes and his head dipped at the extra heat that was placed against his body with how close Walter was.

“Morgan,” Walter whispered, calling Morgan’s gaze to his face and there was a breathless little look in those pale blue eyes. One that had Walter’s chest constricting and his gut squirming. Morgan. Perfect, spoiled little Morgan. Happy, stupid smile Morgan. Walter’s first and last thought

of every day. Every stupid future daydream of what his life could be. It always had Morgan in it somewhere. Morgan was always his future.

There was the passion of a thousand suns under the boy's skin, a true north that Walter held to for stability. A saucer to his teacup. A passion like liquid adrenaline being injected right into Walter's bloodstream - not so strong as to freak him out, but just enough to make his skin prickle.

"Yes?" Morgan asked softly.

For the first time in years Walter felt like if he opened his mouth nothing witty or interesting would come out. He would be mute, unable to answer a question that he didn't know he had prompted. His voice was gone, and his cheeks flushed, stomach heavy. His heart pounded in his throat, threatening to rip out of him. His body numbed as Morgan stepped a little closer and Walter became painfully conscious of the strawberry that still clung to the boy's hair and skin. He would remember the scent of strawberries for the rest of his days.

Walter's eyes dipped to those pink lips and the urge to lean forward and touch them with his own was debilitating. He wanted to know what Morgan tasted like, felt like. He wanted to know if Morgan's breath would stutter, and his heart would stop. He wanted to know if Morgan would kiss him back or shove him away.

There were too many things against Walter though. He knew there were. Their parents were the first in the long list. Their age. The physical distance between them. His addictions that he struggled with and didn't tell anyone about. School falling to the wayside. His scholarship was bound to be a ship that sailed far far away.

His coach. He didn't even want to think about that man or the things he would whisper in Walter's ears when no one was looking and the way that Walter felt so dirty after each practice, how he had to scrub himself raw in the shower in a futile attempt to remove those words from his skin. And Walter wasn't sure if he actually just wanted something physical or if this meant something more to him. Was this a single moment and he was about to fuck up everything or would this turn into something more?

He had never been with a boy, had never once thought of being with a boy. His coach had effectively extinguished any flame that could have possibly been struck there, but there was something about Morgan that sent a little spark through him. There was something safe with Morgan. Something familiar and unjudging with Morgan. If this was something, could be anything, it would blossom with Morgan.

Morgan's hair and skin caught the unnatural orange of the sunset, painting him in an ethereal glow and Walter's hand reached up, ready to risk it. Ready to tangle his fingers in the kid's hair and ruin him. Ready to show Morgan exactly why this was called the City of Love, but those icy blue eyes severed the feeling when he met them once more. His courage went up in smoke and he felt small next to the boy.

His hand dropped back to his side, and he quickly looked down, finding his excuse on his arm. "I-I bought you something," he said quickly, and Morgan's face dipped into what Walter could only take as disappointment before it was replaced with a smiling acceptance, waiting for Walter to continue. Walter dug into the bag on his arm and produced a small box that had a clear lid and Morgan grinned. "*Ces macarons sont très magnifiques.*" (These macaroons are very beautiful.)

“I’m sure,” Morgan said with a small laugh. Walter opened the small box and Morgan picked out a wickedly bright red one before crunching down on it. He hummed and closed his eyes and Walter bit his bottom lip, wishing he wasn’t such a coward. Wishing he could just close the space between them. “*La perfection absolue,*” (Absolutely perfect.) Morgan moaned around another bite and Walter exhaled sharply at the way his gut clenched. *“Merci, Wally. Aujourd'hui a été ... la perfection.*” (Thanks, Wally. Today has been...perfection.) Morgan gave a snort and shook his head. “Sorry,” he quickly corrected in English. “How do you switch so effortlessly between languages. I get stuck in them sometimes.”

Walter gave a shrug. “I’m conscious through every word when it’s not English. It’s paralyzing. I have this undying need to be perfect.”

“Because of Father?”

Walter gave a small nod and shoved a whole cookie into his mouth causing Morgan to laugh and shake his head, returning his gaze gratefully back out to the sunset. “You know how he was with my German. I would hate for him to see me screw up something like French.”

“You know that you don’t have to be perfect for them, don’t you?” Morgan asked sadly before grabbing another cookie to munch on. “They wouldn’t care if you dropped out of school and came back home.”

“*You* wouldn’t care,” Walter corrected, nudging Morgan with an elbow.

Morgan shook his head. “I’m serious. They would still love you unconditionally.”

“No, they wouldn’t.” Walter gave a laugh to dismiss the inadequacies that were swirling through his body and making him feel weaker than the height was. “They scare me, Einstein. They’re terrifying in their perfection.”

Morgan snorted. “They aren’t perfect. If you were ever home, you would know that Dad still burns food and that Father constantly misplaces his glasses. Father messed up the Goldberg Variations the other day. Said he couldn’t remember the notes. Dad was kissing him, so I don’t think it really counts, but...”

Walter gave a smile and shook out Morgan’s waves. “You almost done here? My knees are going to snap.”

Morgan gave a concerned nod. “Yeah. We can go back down.”

The tenseness from Walter released the moment he stepped off the stairs and onto solid ground and Morgan couldn’t stop from smiling at how Walter straightened up with a deep breath as if he hadn’t been able to inhale deep enough before.

“Are we heading back to the hotel?” Morgan asked and was shocked when he received an incredulous look from Walter.

“No, Einstein. I am nowhere near done with you yet.” A hand reached out and snatched up Morgan’s loosened tie and Morgan was drug back across that grassy field until they were at the very opposite end of it. The heat of the day persisted despite the fact that the sun was nearly down. Morgan was out of breath when they finally stopped and Walter turned to face Morgan, hands on

Morgan's shoulders after releasing the tie in his grip that was now scrunched up from sweat. "Alright. Stand right here and don't move."

"Wally," Morgan laughed, head turning against the order to glance back at the tower that stood proudly behind him. Hands snatched up his face and pulled him back to face Walter who was glowing with the sunset behind him, looking so much like a J. M. W. Turner painting that Morgan felt his breath leave his lips. Walter's thumbs gently caressed his cheeks and there was an unbelieving smile on his lips.

"You're impossible," he scolded Morgan teasingly. "You can't ever just listen to me, can you? You have to do whatever you want."

"Wally," Morgan whispered, unsure where his voice had gone, desperately wanting to know why Walter was being this kind to him. It wasn't that Walter wasn't kind to Morgan. He absolutely was, but he had never been like this. He had never been open and vulnerable with Morgan. Not since Germany. Not since he opened the door to Hannibal's room and stepped inside before returning with a haunted look to shove cleaning supplies into his hands. "I-"

"Just face this way a little longer, Morgan. I promise it will be worth it," Walter whispered, thumbs still gentle in their caressing of Morgan's face and Morgan's heart fluttered in betrayal in his chest.

Was Morgan reading too far into this? Of course, he was. He always did. Walter's actions were nothing more than just actions. This didn't mean anything to him. He wouldn't care about the blush that was creeping a path across all of Morgan's skin. He wouldn't see the way that Morgan's limbs turned to jello whenever Walter touched him. He wouldn't notice the way that Morgan couldn't breathe. Wouldn't notice the silent begging across Morgan's face that the kid couldn't hold back. A plea of, *kiss me. Please just kiss me.*

Only Walter saw. He did see. And felt. He felt all of it. Every little emotion flooding off Morgan and pin pricking across Walter's flesh. Walter almost did. Almost closed the distance between them, but the lights on the Eiffel Tower as the sun finally faded brought him slamming back into himself.

Morgan's blue eyes were closed, and his breathing halted, but once more Walter's confidence shattered and all he could do was lean forward and place a kiss to Morgan's forehead. It was close, just not enough, but it had to be enough. It just had to be for now. For the rest of time. They could never come back to this space. This was now and this was all it would ever be.

Walter pulled back and his soul smashed into a thousand pieces at the look in Morgan's eyes. A look that would haunt his dreams, a look that he wished he could wipe from the kid's face with something more substantial than a stupid radio tower left to rot that stood behind them.

"Look," he whispered, unable to make his voice go louder. He let his hands drop from Morgan's cheeks and to the kid's shoulders, slowly turning Morgan around. The reaction wasn't immediate, and Walter bit his tongue with bated breath, waiting for that stupid little smile to once more cover Morgan's lips. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes," Morgan answered dully, blinking blankly up at the tower that was lit up with the brightness of the sun. That stupid little smile did come back to Morgan's face as soon as the light show started. Flashing lights that glittered like stars through the darkness that clung unforgivingly to the heat of the day. "And you get to see this all of the time?"

“When money allows,” Walter answered. “I stretch it pretty thin. I don’t like asking dad and father for help.”

“I’m jealous. If I saw you every day, forever, Wally, I would remember this time.”

Walter let out a deep breath, a hand slowly caressing the back of Morgan’s neck. “Strange seeing you here in front of me. Been staring at afterimages of you in places you haven't been in years.”

“Come visit more often and maybe I’ll be something more real.”

# Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

> “No one has died, Will,” Hannibal reminded softly, unperturbed it would seem.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Morgan left the bathroom, changing spots with Walter so that Walter could shower away the stickiness of the sweat from the day. Morgan ran his fingers through his damp waves, finding it too hot to pull on his shirt. He tossed his shirt and sleep pants aside, settling for just his boxers and snatched up his new book that was beside his Marcus Aurelius book.

He opened the window and let the sound of the city into the hotel room that was just as stifling as it was outside. There was no breeze, the only thing keeping Morgan cool was the remnants of his cold shower.

He settled himself in the corner of the window seat, ready to indulge himself in a bit of reading before the evening was spent. The binding creaked, its spine ached with age and use. Morgan’s eyes widened, surprised when bright orange fell across his chest and into his lap.

Sunflower petals had been pressed between the pages that he had hardly been able to make a dent in that day. He leaned his head back against the wall and placed the book over his eyes, allowing its knowledge to press gently against his eyelids.

A smile crept across his lips and the air grew thick with a tenderness that couldn’t help but make him breathe slower, deeper, happier. He plucked a single petal into his fingers, feeling the silky

texture for a moment before he sat up, the book long forgotten.

Morgan slowly scooped all the petals back up and placed them kindly between the pages to allow the poetry to sink into the flowers that Walter had no doubt snatched up while at the Eiffel Tower, though Morgan wasn't entirely sure when Walter had had the time.

Morgan placed the book aside and moved over to one of the beds, sinking down into it, letting the light ache fill his muscles from all the walking he had done that day. Sleep pulled at him, but the heat of the room made it impossible to give into the influences.

The sound of the shower turned off and Morgan opened a single eye when the bathroom door opened. Walter left the room; a towel being used to dry off his hair. He tossed the towel to a corner and Morgan sat up a bit more with a roll of his eyes.

"I'll pick it up later," Walter defended.

"I didn't say anything," Morgan muttered, stretching out with a small whine.

"You forget that I know you, Einstein. Better than others."

"You're the only one who knows me, Wally." Morgan sighed and sat up fully, pulling a pillow to him and cuddling it to his chest. Walter sat on the edge of the bed and Morgan tipped his head curiously. Walter had been so distant the day before, made sure everything between them was separated and now... Walter was making himself comfortable. He lay across the bed, head beside Morgan's knee. "Why did you grow out your hair?" Morgan asked, hand reaching out to play with the damp locks without a thought.

Walter's eyes closed with a sigh. "Does it look bad?"

"No."

Walter gave a small smile and Morgan flushed, grateful that those sunny eyes didn't open to tease him.

"To get under father's skin. I'm surprised he let yours get as long as it is."

Morgan's fingers continued to work through Walter's dark hair, pulling tangles from it. "I told him that it wasn't fair that dad got to keep his hair long and I couldn't."

Walter snorted and his eyes opened. "And he let you get away with that?"

"No," Morgan grumbled. "He made me do the dishes."

Walter made a horrified sort of sound, his words dripping sarcasm. "Not the dishes."

"Hand wash the dishes in the whole kitchen, whether they were dirty or not," Morgan clarified.

"China too?"

Morgan nodded. "Dad got home from fishing and threw a fit. There were dishes drying everywhere I could find to put them. Teacups on the floor, silverware on the couch. It was awful."

Walter shook his head. “I didn’t see you as someone who would mouth off to father.” There was a soft sigh as Morgan tugged at Walter’s hair. Walter’s eyes fluttered shut and he licked his lips. Morgan couldn’t stop the smile that pulled at the corner of his lips. “I’ve missed you. Missed this.”

“This?” Morgan asked curiously. Walter nodded, tipping his head into the pull Morgan had against his hair. “This what?”

“Us.”

“Us?”

“Us,” Walter agreed with a small nod. “I haven’t seen you in so long. You’re so different.”

“Different in a good way, I hope,” Morgan whispered.

“You’ve grown up.”

“You’ve been calling me a child all day,” Morgan argued with a roll of his eyes that made Walter laugh.

“You’ll always be a kid in my eyes. I am older.”

“Asshole. I’m not a child.” Morgan pulled his hand from Walter’s hair and smacked across Walter’s bare chest. Walter snorted and snatched up Morgan’s hand, holding it to his chest. “Let go.”

“Or what, big man?” Walter teased, pulling Morgan’s hand, and dragging the younger down and off balance enough that Morgan tumbled into the bed beside Walter. “What are you going to do?”

“Slit your throat,” Morgan grumbled, though there was still a smile on Morgan’s lips as he tried to straighten himself back up. Walter bit his lip as a sharp heat pooled down in his gut, something that he was so familiar with and because it was for Morgan, he swallowed it down. He closed his eyes, willing the stirring to dissipate. “I wouldn’t actually hurt you, Wally.”

“What?” Walter asked in a struggling voice, eyes flickering open.

“I was teasing. I wasn’t going to-”

“You couldn’t, even if you wanted to,” Walter taunted, letting Morgan’s hand go. That was safe. Rude was safe. Playing, teasing was safe. Touching wasn’t safe. It was the farthest thing from safe. Walter just had to ignore it. Always ignore. From now, until the end of time.

“What do you mean I couldn’t?” Morgan demanded with a frown. Mad was safe.

“Oh, please. Einstein.” Walter scoffed and rolled his eyes. “You couldn’t hurt a fly.”

"Fuck off, Walter."

"Precisely,” Walter whispered, clasping both hands on his bare chest and closing his eyes with a small sigh. “See? You couldn’t-” The words died as Morgan’s light body straddled his hips and Walter winced at the heat it sent south against his will. “Morgan,” he muttered, hands taking Morgan’s hips, trying to push Morgan from him, but Morgan held firm. Morgan’s hands took Walter’s neck and applied a light pressure to it. “Get off.”

“Why?” Morgan challenged. “I’m not a fucking child and I’m not weak.”

“Yes, you are.”

There was pain in Morgan’s face, but before he could retort, Walter’s phone went off from the bedside table. “Tell your girlfriend hi,” Morgan muttered, rolling off Walter and draping a pillow over his face in an attempt to hide from Walter, when he knew better. He could never hide from Walter. Walter would always know him, always see him.

“It’s father,” Walter’s voice said, hurt somewhere in the tone. “Hello.” Morgan pushed the pillow from over his face for a moment and sighed when Walter lay back beside him, phone on speaker. “What’s up?”

“We’re going to be a bit longer than we thought,” Hannibal answered, voice cracking up across the line. “We might not be back until tomorrow night. We thought we would just check in on you two.”

“We’re fine. Long day,” Walter answered.

“Yeah. Walter’s a pussy when it comes to heights,” Morgan threw out and Walter scowled.

“Behave, young man,” Hannibal scolded with a tired sigh. “Did you both have a good day?”

“The best,” Walter replied, though there was something not exactly truthful in the words and Morgan’s brows furrowed as he looked over Walter’s face. Had it been that bad of a day? There had been tension in it, sure, but there was always tension between them. That’s what came with their conversations. They had always been a push and pull and Morgan had just figured it had to do with the types of conversations they could hold between them. Things far deeper than any other conversations he had held outside of the family or even with Will and Hannibal. “I’m sure we can come up with something to do tomorrow to pass the time. No rush.”

“We love you,” Will’s voice said, and Morgan gave a small smile.

“We love you too,” he answered, shooting Walter a dark look at the roll of toffee eyes. “Come back safe.”

“Always,” Hannibal assured. “Get some rest boys. It’s late.”

“Bye, Dad. Bye Father,” Walter grumbled, ending the call with a sigh. “My girlfriend, huh?”

“It was a logical conclusion,” Morgan defended, reaching out to the lamp that was on and clicking it off. The room filled with darkness, the light from the street still giving enough brightness to the room to see outlines. “She must love you very much if she hasn’t even messaged you today.”

“Shut up,” Walter grumbled, rearranging himself so he was beside Morgan, head on pillows. He reached out cautiously, eyes closed in fear before his hand finally rested on Morgan’s shoulder. “Can I...?”

“Always.” Morgan’s answer came in a breathy whisper and Walter instantly snatched up the younger boy’s body, pulling Morgan close to himself. He tucked Morgan against his chest, arms circling the boy tightly, ignoring the way that skin was already sweaty again from the heat of the

night. Walter's heartbeat through his chest and against Morgan's back as their breathing slowly matched. "It's hard to sleep without you."

"I know, Einstein," Walter whispered, nuzzling his face into Morgan's neck, the scent of strawberries overwhelming. "I know."

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*"Just face this way a little longer, Morgan. I promise it will be worth it," Walter whispered, thumbs still gentle in their caressing of Morgan's face and Morgan's heart fluttered in betrayal in his chest.*

*Was Morgan reading too far into this? Of course, he was. He always did. Walter's actions were nothing more than just actions. This didn't mean anything to him. He wouldn't care about the blush that was creeping a path across all of Morgan's skin. He wouldn't see the way that Morgan's limbs turned to jello whenever Walter touched him. He wouldn't notice the way that Morgan couldn't breathe. Wouldn't notice the silent begging across Morgan's face that the kid couldn't hold back. A plea of, kiss me. Please just kiss me.*

*Only Walter saw. He did see. And felt. He felt all of it. Every little emotion flooding off of Morgan was pin pricking across Walter's flesh. It drowned him, entombed him and he couldn't fight it anymore, wasn't sure if he ever had a chance because he was so pathetically weak, and had always been weak.*

*Morgan's blue eyes were closed, and his breathing halted, held in a timeless weightlessness. So beautiful and perfect just as he was. His body was pulled forward and Morgan stumbled as his feet tried to keep up with him.*

*Warm breath caressed his lips and his body shrunk as lips were pressed to his. His knees buckled and one of Walter's arms wrapped around his waist, pulling Morgan closer. Morgan thought that his lungs were going to burst when Walter finally let him go.*

*Morgan gasped, hands clinging to Walter's wrist and bicep to stay upright. His eyes slowly flickered open, and he stared up at maple eyes that looked just as surprised as he felt.*

*"I-I-I-" Walter stuttered, brows furrowing. "I'm sorry."*

*"Why?" Morgan asked, chest tight as he continued to let Walter hold up his weight, unsure if he could.*

*“I shouldn’t have done that. I just...”*

*“Just?”*

*“I’ve ruined us, haven’t I?” Walter asked, head falling forward, but he didn’t dare release Morgan, afraid that the boy would run if given the chance. “Ruined anything and everything between us. We can’t come back from this.”*

*“What makes you think that I want to?”*

*“Morgan,” Walter scolded, though there was no real bite to it. “You’re still a child. You’re far too young for this to work between us.”*

*“Then help me grow up. Be my strength just as you always have been. I’ve always trusted you, Wally. I trust you now.”*

*“You don’t know what you’re asking.”*

*“Then show me and let me decide."*

*"Hotel. Now," Walter whispered, kissing Morgan once more, soundly. Morgan only trembled in his grip at the order. He turned around and caught a glimpse of the glittering Eiffel Tower, but it didn't hold quite the same spark to it that Walter's hand did as it drug Morgan along.*

*The trip back to the hotel felt like it took an eternity and the moment the door opened, Morgan was shoved inside and once more kissed, something hungry.*

*"I've wanted to do this all day," Walter gasped out between kisses.*

*"I've wanted you to do this all day," Morgan admitted softly, body weak against Walter's.*

*"This goes as far as you want Morgan, ok?" Walter pulled back and rested his head against Morgan's. "I don't want to do anything you don't want, and I know myself well enough to know if you give me an inch, I will go the mile."*

*"Wally?" Morgan asked softly. "Don't stop kissing me. Please. Just let what happens happen."*

*“I don’t want to-”*

*“You won’t break me, Wally. I promise.” Morgan pushed forward and kissed Walter again and that seemed to be enough. Walter scooped Morgan from the floor and carried Morgan over to one of the two beds in the room. Gentle was the only word that came to mind as Walter rested Morgan back on the bed and climbed over the top of him. “Is this real?”*

*“I hope so,” Walter whispered huskily, kissing across Morgan’s cheek. “What happens in the morning Morgan? What are we-”*

*“We figure that out in the morning,” Morgan interrupted, letting Walter’s fingers pull his tie from around his neck. He sighed; head tipping back as soft lips trailed worshiping kisses down the column of his throat. “Just don’t stop.”*

*“I don’t really know what I’m doing,” Walter admitted as his fingers unbuttoned Morgan’s shirt, tracing the strong muscles that were there. Muscles that had seen battle and lived a hundred times*

*over. Muscles that Walter praised with kisses that made Morgan whimper and arch.*

*"Me neither," Morgan whispered with a small laugh that quickly turned into a sigh at a kiss against his sternum. "But you've been with people before. I-I mean-" There was a moan as Walter's mouth found one of his nipples and lightly sucked on it. "Walter."*

*"Sorry," Walter whispered, sitting up just slightly.*

*Morgan shook his head desperately. "So good. Don't stop." Walter gave a kind smile and took Morgan once more in his mouth, tongue teasing softly. There was another moan and Morgan's hands tangled in sweat damp hair, tugging at it lightly. "You were the one that explained sex to me. You should know-"*

*"It's different between men," Walter interrupted, moving to give Morgan's other nipple the same attention. Morgan gasped as teeth scraped against him, eyes closed tightly, trapped in the pleasantly painful heat at the base of his spine. "And we absolutely can stop." Morgan shook his head and licked his lips. He let Walter push his shirt off and Walter's fingers trailed over all of Morgan's exposed flesh. "You're beautiful."*

*"So, you've been saying all day," Morgan teased, eyes opening enough to meet a surprised expression.*

*"I-I..." Walter trailed off, a blush coming to his cheeks, and he quickly looked away. Morgan's expression twisted to one of confusion and he sat up, reaching a hand out to Walter. Morgan caressed one of Walter's cheeks and the man leaned into it with a sigh. "It just slipped out. I-I wasn't trying-I just-"*

*"Hush," Morgan whispered, pulling Walter back to him for a kiss. Morgan's arms wrapped around Walter's neck and held the man close, enjoying that way that Walter's strong hands took his bare hips. "I've never seen you in such a nervous wreck before," Morgan whispered, resting his forehead to Walter's. "It's just me, Wally. You know me. There's nothing to be afraid of."*

*"You're everything to be afraid of," Walter argued in a quiet voice. "You terrify me."*

*"Why?" Morgan gave a small laugh and bit his bottom lip. "I'm not that scary."*

*"Because you deserve something that's perfect and that's not me."*

*"Let me decide for myself," Morgan instructed softly, leaning up to steal another kiss. "Wally, I told you that I trust you. I always have and that's not about to change. If you're this afraid, we can stop here. Just cuddle and kiss me the rest of the night."*

*"No," Walter muttered with a shake of his head. "I want this with you. I just-"*

*"Don't think this hard, Wally," Morgan instructed, leaning back enough that Walter was soon back over the top of him. "Just feel with me. You don't need to be afraid."*

*Walter sighed and lowered himself over Morgan, resting his head against Morgan's shoulder. "I'm afraid to take off my clothes around you."*

*"What?" Morgan gave a small snicker and shook his head, hugging Walter tightly to him, enjoying the extra warmth over his body despite the summer's heat. "Why on earth would you be*

*embarrassed about that? You have nothing to be embarrassed over. I've seen you shirtless a hundred times. You're stunning, Wally."*

*"It's not my body that I'm embarrassed over, it's the look that's going to cover your face once you see me," Walter explained, pressing a kiss to Morgan's shoulder.*

*"I'm not going to laugh if your dick's small, Walter."*

*Walter shook his head and pushed himself up to meet Morgan's gaze. "It's not that."*

*"Let me see then," Morgan suggested softly, a hand caressing Walter's cheek. "Because I'm not understanding."*

*"Undress me," Walter whispered, and Morgan gave a nod. Walter closed his eyes with a pained expression before sitting up. Morgan followed and took the hem of Walter's shirt, pushing it up and over perfect muscles. Morgan leaned forward and kissed Walter's abdomen, smiling when Walter shuttered with a shiver. Walter helped pull his shirt over his head and Morgan's eyes trailed over Walter's body. "Please don't say anything yet," Walter begged quietly, eyes closed tightly. "Just keep going before you say anything."*

*Morgan's eyes jumped from the bruising that covered Walter's body that he hadn't noticed earlier that day. Why hadn't he noticed? Was he too enthralled with watching Walter play soccer that he hadn't recognized the deep blues, purples, greens, and yellows over nearly every inch of Walter's body?*

*"Wally-"*

*"Please!" Walter begged, causing Morgan's mouth to go dry. "Please keep going or I'm going to lose my nerve."*

*Morgan slowly obeyed, fingers working on the button and zipper of Walter's jeans before slowly pushing at the fabric. It slid down over Walter's hips and Morgan watched as more of Walter's tanned skin was exposed, more blues and reds greeting Morgan. Walter stood from the bed and kicked off his shoes and socks, letting his jeans drop fully to the ground, waiting with held breath and eyes on Morgan.*

*"Do..." Morgan's blue eyes followed the line of Walter's body, noting the way one of his ankles looked a little swollen. That must have been the cause of his limp. He still played soccer on such an ankle? "Do you want to tell me about it?"*

*Walter looked shocked, jaw dropping open slightly before he found it in himself to close his mouth. "You're not going to demand to know what happened?" Morgan shook his head, but the concern didn't leave his eyes. "Why?"*

*"It's not my place," Morgan answered softly. "If you don't want to tell me, you don't have to, but I do want to know." Morgan pushed himself up and onto his knees, moving to the edge of the bed to be beside the still standing Walter. Morgan hesitantly reached out and his fingertips gingerly traced some of the bruising.*

*"Will you tell dad and father?" Walter asked with a clicking and dry swallow. Morgan shook his head before leaning over to press a kiss to a newer bruise on his arm. It was feather light, just a brush of lips, but it made Walter's knees go weak at the emotion that was poured into it. "I... School*

*isn't good, Morgan." Walter's hand reached up and tangled into Morgan's hair as the boy continued to place special attention kisses to Walter's injuries. "I'm failing my classes; I can't stop drinking or doing drugs." There was a pause in Morgan's kisses, but he quickly started them once more, somehow injecting more emotions into Walter's skin than before. Walter's throat closed around a lump and tears pricked at his eyes. "I go to parties almost every night. I sleep around. I-I..." Walter inhaled sharply at a kiss to his collar bone that sent a shiver down the length of his spine. His hands instinctively took Morgan's hips and pulled Morgan closer. "I don't sleep, I don't eat. I'm just there."*

*"Who did this to you, Wally?" Morgan questioned, pressing kisses into Walter's jaw, the stubble scratching at his lips, but he didn't care. "Who hurts you like this?"*

*"My coach," Walter whispered, hugging Morgan securely to him, eyes shut tightly. "I want to walk away from my scholarship. I don't know if I can be around that man anymore. He touches me." Morgan stiffened at the words and Walter pressed a kiss to the boy's temple in reassurance, though he wasn't sure if it worked. "Not..." Walter sighed. "Not like that. But I can tell he wants to. And he says these things to me when no one is watching. These awful things, Morgan."*

*"Tell me?"*

*"No," Walter whispered quickly with a shake of his head. "I can't repeat them."*

*"You don't have to tell me anymore, Wally," Morgan pushed, hugging Walter back just as tightly, paying close attention to the bruising so that he didn't hurt the older. "You don't need to tell me."*

*"He shoves me and trips me and hits me because I won't do what he asks me to do," Walter whispered. "I won't let him violate me, Morgan, but there's only so much I can do to make it look like accidents and-"*

*"You don't have to put up with that, Wally. You could take care of him if you wanted to."*

*"I'm not that kind of person, Morgan. I don't want to be like our parents."*

*"Would you like to stop talking about this?" Morgan pulled back, hands taking Walter's cheeks. Walter gave a small nod. "Did you want to keep going with what we were doing?"*

*"You aren't..." Walter's brows furrowed, and he licked his lips. "You want to keep going?"*

*"As long as we won't hurt you. You've been on your ankle far more than you should have," Morgan answered. "A few bruises aren't a turn off, as long as you're ok."*

*"I'm ok," Walter agreed softly, pulling Morgan back to him to kiss. Morgan melted against him, and Walter sighed at the weakness of the boy. His fingers found Morgan's slacks and undid them, hands pushing the fabric from Morgan's body. Morgan helped shrug out of them before pulling Walter back onto the bed and over the top of him so that he could feel Walter's skin against his own. "Morgan," Walter whispered in adoration between kisses. "I want you."*

*"Me too," Morgan muttered, fingers once more finding Walter's hair and tangling in them.*

---

Walter's eyes flickered open in the darkness of the room, the sounds of the city that was still awake were loud from the open window. Walter inhaled deeply and did his best to hide his groan as he

finally placed himself inside of his own body. A deep, hot pain stuck in his boxers made a flush come to his cheeks and his heart raced.

He pushed from the bed, ignoring the small whimper from a still asleep Morgan, and rushed to the bathroom. The door shut and locked behind him and he leaned his back against the door, hiding his face in his hands with a shaky exhale.

“Fuck,” he whispered as he dug at his eyes with the heels of his hands until he saw colors. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.” Walter rushed to the mirror, hands taking the edge of the sink as he leaned over and stared at his reflection. His hair was a wild mess, his face flushed red. He bit his lip and shook his head. “You prev,” he scolded himself. “You’re such a fucking perv. He’s a kid.” Walter pushed himself off the counter and went to the shower, turning it on as cold as it could go. “He’s fourteen. Stop!”

Without undressing or checking the water, Walter stepped into the stream, an immediate shiver racing down his spine and he clutched at himself to try to stay warm. His teeth chattered despite the heat in the rest of the room, and he groaned when his body refused to react the way he wanted it to.

“Fuck,” he groaned, head leaning against the side of the shower. “He’s your brother, dipshit. You’re straight. So, fucking straight.” Walter’s eyes shut tightly, and he shivered once more as water soaked his boxers.

He was straight. He found women blindingly attractive and actively slept around. He was safe, sure, but that didn’t stop him from quickies and one-night stands. That wasn’t the right train of thought. It was doing nothing to stop the ache between his legs.

He despised when men looked at him like that. He never actively said anything because there was no reason to tell a man off if Walter was hit on. It should have been flattering, but it wasn’t. It was gross and made him feel dirty and.... That was better.

*Do we need to check that again? Your form could be-*

“Shut up,” Walter hissed as his coach’s words swarmed his head. He shook his head against the shower wall, anger heating his body to the point where he hardly noticed the chill of the water any longer.

*After practice, I need to see you in my office for a physical check-*

“Shut up.”

*I love the way you look when you run sprints across-*

“Shut up!” Walter's voice rose, but he didn’t put much thought to it, trapped in his own mental hellscape.

*I like those shorts, Grant. Makes your ass-*

“Shut the fuck up!”

*Misbehave for me again, Grant. You know how much I love to discipline you... In private.*

“Shut up, shut up, shut up!”

*We've had fun across these years, haven't we? And tonight, you are going to finally give me what I need to put in a good word for you with the scouts. Now open your pretty legs and let me see the package.*

"Fuck you!" Walter's fist slammed against the shower wall, the pain and loud thud enough to break him from the image of the older man not so stealthily adjusting himself in his pants. Walter's eyes shot open, his breathing shot and ragged. His body shook with rage, his jaw clenched so tightly that he thought his teeth would shatter. He unhinged his jaw and ran a hand over his face, trying to catch his breath as the ache in his teeth set in. "Fuck you," he gasped. "Fuck you."

With rage perfectly, and welcomingly, replacing any feeling of lust that Walter had had moments before, the water was turned off and Walter stripped of his boxers, leaving them in the bottom of the shower to dry. He fetched a towel and dried himself off before wrapping it around his waist and leaving the bathroom.

Walter stiffened at a tired voice that called out to him. "Wally? Are you ok? There was a loud-"

"I'm fine," Walter swiftly interrupted, his voice harsher than he meant it to be. He winced and gave a sigh. "Everything's ok. Go back to sleep."

Morgan's outline rose from the bed and stretched. "What were you doing?"

"Too... hot." Walter rolled his eyes at the pathetic half-truth, but pushed it aside and went for his bag to grab new clothes. "Needed to cool off." Walter flinched as the bedside lamp was turned on. "Go back to sleep, Einstein."

Morgan didn't move, but gratefully stayed quiet as Walter found another pair of boxers to change into. Instead of making the smart decision and sleeping in the other bed, Walter found himself once more on the bed beside Morgan. He huffed in annoyance as those wintery blue eyes looked over him and he turned his back to Morgan.

"Would you turn off the light and go to sleep, kid? I'm not in the mood."

There wasn't an answer, but a caress to Walter's shoulder caused the man to jump and quickly snap his head around to look at Morgan, who was absently tracing a marking in Walter's skin.

"I didn't want to say anything earlier," Morgan said softly, head tipped to the side as his finger continued to outline a bruise that had been caused from being shoved into a goal post. "And I know that sports can hurt you; you used to come home from games and practices all banged up, but..." Walter watched as Morgan bit his bottom lip as he most likely decided on what to say. "Why are you all beat up? You-You don't have to tell me."

"I'd rather not," Walter grumbled, turning away from Morgan again.

"Ok," Morgan agreed simply, hand leaving Walter. The light flickered off and Walter could feel the bed move as Morgan settled back into it. "Just know that you can always tell me anything, Wally."

Walter rolled his eyes and chewed on his tongue, ignoring the pull of the kid behind him. Time clicked by for what could have been hours or merely minutes, Walter wasn't sure, but soon enough he couldn't fight it any longer.

He turned around and found Morgan's body once more, pulling the boy closer to him to inhale artificial strawberries. Morgan groaned, and nuzzled his face into the pillow, having obviously been able to fall asleep.

"Wally-"

"Shh," Walter whispered, closing his eyes as the normality and comfort of the position lulled his aching chest into something a bit lighter. "Go back to sleep."

"Mm, hmm," Morgan grumbled with a tired nod and a yawn, hand draping over Walter's arm.

Strawberries were what lulled Walter back to sleep, into a safer sleep than previously.

---

Will sighed and placed the newspaper aside, once more looking over the headlines. "We need to take a rest. We can't keep finding people for him to practice on," Will stated, reaching out for the cup of coffee that was set in front of him at the small café he and Hannibal had stopped at for breakfast. He took a drink, eyes once more reading over the article that reminded him a bit of Tattlecrime.

*-Hospital Mutilator, Psycho, or a Benefactor?*

*A successful cholecystectomy was performed on Mr. Johan Berg. As per usual, Mr. Berg was suffering from an inflamed gallbladder and would soon have contracted jaundice. His surgery was scheduled at Danderyds Hospital, but the man was reported missing several days before that. It is under suspicion that the Hospital Mutilator is possibly a doctor that works for several facilities and can gain access to patient charts to see what surgery needs to be performed and when it is scheduled for. Mr. Berg was found alive and in a mostly stable condition and has been treated by Danderyds Hospital, which he had been reportedly left outside of.-*

"No one has died, Will," Hannibal reminded softly, unperturbed it would seem.

"You know I don't care if they die." Will rolled his eyes behind his sunglasses. Hannibal had to know him better by now. They had only been living this life for the last long while. "I care about our son being discovered. Give him a break. Maybe have him start working on drugs again. He needs to keep his tolerance up."

Hannibal nodded, sipping from his own cup. "You're right as always, love."

"One of us has to stay sharp." The tease caused Hannibal's brows to rise offendedly. Will's lips ticked up into a smile. "Please. You've gone soft."

"I have not."

"You have too. Soft and cocky. You're too high up on your throne and if you're not careful you're going to be humbled." Will leaned back in his chair, looking out at the crowds passing by. His mind wandered over the last few hours, curious how their sons had been fairing after their phone call had been the most forced conversation Will could recall ever having with either of his sons. "The boys sounded tense last night. Do you think anything happened?"

"Other than the two of them arguing just like they always do?" Hannibal asked back with the hint of laughter in his tone. "They are more than capable at handling themselves."

“Right.” Will sighed, fingers tapping on the tabletop absentmindedly. “I wish he’d come visit more. Do you think we-”

“He is old enough to decide what to do with his time,” Hannibal defended. Will wasn’t sure when their roles had switched. When had Hannibal been the one who relaxed into the family aesthetic and left Will to be the one to overthink and worry? He recalled fondly when Hannibal was the one who would come to be anxious about their children. “And whether that is to spend it with us or with another girlfriend, we do not have a say. We only need support.”

“I hate that you’re always right.” Will finished off his coffee and folded up the newspaper to hide away the headline that he didn’t need to keep rereading when he had the article memorized. “Promise that we’ll take a break. We need to let the heat cool down. Especially if it's starting to reach out to other countries. If it keeps going soon it’ll reach back home, and I do not want eyes on us. I’m not about to lose this.”

Will glanced down as a hand took his that was still tapping away and gave it a comforting squeeze. Will gave Hannibal a half smile and returned the grip. “You won’t lose this, Will. Nothing is going to happen to us.”

“Because we’re going to be smart, right?” Will pushed, causing Hannibal to frown slightly. “Don't think that just because we’ve been free for so long that we’re invincible. Because we aren’t. Bedelia's carving fork should have shown you that years ago if the Dragon didn’t.”

Hannibal’s hand reached up and rubbed his chest at a scar long ago from a dinner he had taken such a long time to prepare. It seemed like ancient history now that he thought back on it. Carving a leg and plating it just to only to be stabbed by the hidden weapon in a cloth napkin.

“We’re going to be smart about this,” Hannibal finally agreed. “Let’s pick up the boys and after dinner we’ll stop at the Palais Garnier for the ballet.”

---

Walter: 22

Morgan: 15

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Normally the ropes were comforting. Being bound up was the equivalent of a weighted blanket, he assumed. It usually could remove the tension. He could let his body just fall into the ropes that held his body at attention. Relax into them and let them do the work for him.

The gags and blindfolds took away his need to speak and see and if he didn’t need to speak or see, then he didn’t have to think. And if he didn’t have to think then he didn’t have to act. He was relieved of the challenge of acting and deciding. In this space all he needed to do was feel and be and do as he was told. It was a two-person universe for however long he wanted the session to last.

He could just give over his power, his mind, his will. He would be safe and protected while in a vulnerable and open state. It was out of his hands and up to someone else to keep him safe. At least in this space, for a few hours, he could be wanted, even if it were just like that. Mindless and silent. He didn’t need degrees or a job. He just needed to live in this moment.

He would have been happy to do just that until panic set in. He was certain that she hadn’t meant to hurt him. He doubted she would have even known that such a set of words strung together could

break him down so completely that he had to escape.

“So beautiful. You belong on your knees, *Cerbiatto.*” (little fawn.)

Not even when he was wringing the life out of someone had he felt so afraid and trapped and panicked. He had learned since he was a child to control his panic, but sometimes things just snapped. They bent and broke and unfortunately that was him and he didn’t have his parents around to protect him anymore. To jump in after him and save him if something went wrong.

His body started to tremble violently, and he began pulling desperately at the ropes that hadn’t been fully tightened yet.

“I don’t believe I gave you permission to-” she was interrupted, though he wasn’t sure if she heard him.

“Red,” Walter whispered as he continued to pull at the ropes around his wrists. When they didn’t budge, his heart spiked, and his fingers went numb. “Red. Fucking red!”

The shift in the room was instant. Dominance turned to concern, and the woman swiftly stepped over. “Ok,” she hushed, reaching out and pulling his hands towards her. “It’s ok. We’ll get you out.” Her hands were far more controlled, and the moment Walter’s wrists were free, he tried to get to his feet. The girl, a nice blonde woman who Walter had performed several scenes with previously, reached out to take his bare shoulders. “You’ll trip. Let me help.”

Walter did his best to hold his body still as she lowered herself to her knees and began to unwork the knots she had put in place. If she took any longer, he was going to shake himself apart. He couldn’t do this anymore. He couldn’t be weak. He would never be weak again. He would never allow himself to be under someone’s control ever again. He couldn’t. Not when green eyes still haunted him, and those words had been told to him more than once. Never again.

His ankles were released, and Walter jumped to his feet, heading for the door. He snatched up his shirt from the hanger and began to pull it on, trying to ignore how the girl rushed forward, much shorter now, even with her heels on.

“Did I do something wrong?” she asked hurriedly.

“No, Miss Kitty,” Walter muttered, reaching for his jacket and then for the door. “Nothing.”

“Can I do anything to help you relax or-”

“No, Miss Kitty.” Walter shook his head and stepped out the door. “Have a good night.”

“I’ll check up on you in a few hours. Be careful with yourself!” she called after him as he rushed through the rest of the dungeon, up the stairs and out into the night.

Once out, he dug through his jacket pockets until he found his pack of cigarettes. They weren’t the same. Weren’t anywhere near strong enough to outweigh the way that he still suffered from withdrawals. But he figured that these were better than cocaine and they were better than nothing.

He lit one and inhaled as deeply as he could, his hands trembling so badly that he wasn’t sure how he got the lighter to strike. The lighter and pack were forcibly shoved back into his pocket, and he started down the street, back in the direction of his dorms.

Chapter End Notes

Hey all. Bullett6756 here with a message from A_David. Our favorite author has a lot going on right now. So they are going to be taking a mental health break, hence why I'm here delivering the message and they are not. They love you all a lot, and all your comments give them so much joy, but right now they need to do some healing. They will be back as soon as they can be, just be patient with them please. Thank you.

# Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

> Morgan felt the snapped retort on his tongue before he could stop it. “So you read picture books all day?”

Chapter Notes

> I want to give a big thank you to my new beta FyreFlye23. They have been wonderful in helping me for the past few months to scrap some things together. And I wanted to thank all of you for being so patient with me. I have been going through hell and back and struggling mentally and with a lot of other things that all came at once. So as a thank you, I have two chapter for you.
>
> I can't promise when the next update will come out, but I'm hoping now that all of you who have been commenting and rereading my stories has brought me back to this. You light a fire and I'm grateful for you kicking my ass into gear. Fingers crossed. I am hopeful for this one. I promise this is one I will finish, it's just a matter of tackling the mental load that comes with all of the drama attached to it, but I suppose that's what coffee, hair dye, piercings, tattoos and therapists are for, huh? Haha.
>
> Anyways, I hope you all enjoy these next two chapter. They have been a long time coming and I hope they help ease some of the distance there's been. Much love to all of you!

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Morgan: 17

Walter: 24

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“Smells good,” Morgan said as he entered the kitchen of the small flat. He snatched an apple from the basket of fruits that adorned their dark green island counter and he rubbed it on his dress shirt, receiving a disapproving look from Hannibal, though the man didn’t say anything. “What are you making?”

“Do you have to ask?” Hannibal questioned, returning to his work.

“You always make turkey for my birthday,” Morgan pointed out with a shrug, taking a bite of the apple. It crunched between his teeth and his hand swiftly went to his chin as juice ran down it. “Why?”

“It’s your favorite.”

Morgan gave a crooked half smile and took another bite of his apple. “Is it just us tonight?”

““Who were you hoping for, *kleiner hase* ?” Hannibal’s smile was smug and unbudging causing Morgan to roll his eyes. “Walter couldn’t leave school. Finals are coming up. You know how-”

“I know,” Morgan grumbled. “It’s important that he focuses.”

Morgan let out a deep sigh and glanced around the new apartment they had moved into, it still feeling odd and clunky to him. They had been jumping around lately to make sure they weren’t being followed again and had finally settled down. Though Morgan didn’t care for the apartment much, Edinburgh, Scotland had been a vast improvement and had become one of his favorite places. Though, Germany would always be his favorite.

The apartment sat above a store on the Royal Mile. Down one side of the street was a large castle that loomed in the distance, often over casted in mist and rain. Up the other side of the street was a massive cathedral that Morgan had forgotten the name of, but he didn’t really care what the name of it was. He simply loved to go stand beside it and feel how small he was compared to its spires that clawed through the rain to reach towards a god they were never going to reach.

There were shops, shops, and more shops and bars, bars, and more bars. Mostly touristy places, but there were more odds and ends littered among them. Morgan liked to frequent a creepy witch’s store that held onto strange old and new treasures. The one that captivated his attention the most was a book made of human skin.

The pubs were places that he sometimes snuck into with his small group of *friends* that he had been able to make from the apartment that sat above theirs. He wouldn’t ever tell Hannibal or Will, though. Hannibal would have his liver on a platter as a demonstration to show Morgan how badly alcohol affected the organ despite the fact that Hannibal had at least a single glass of wine with dinner.

Every day was busy with tourists and taxis and buses. Sometimes there were bagpipes to wake him from street performers and he enjoyed those days where he could sit in the spare bedroom they had turned into a classroom and look out the window at a mirage of umbrellas outside while his father’s soothing voice taught him more about medical procedures or forgeries or sometimes on really rainy days Hannibal would let him read. Sit in the window seat with a book and head against the cool glass of the window.

The kitchen was small. Smaller than any they had owned before hand and it was a spectacle to watch Hannibal try to navigate it, while holding back his complaints. The counters made an L in the corner and beside it was the washer. A single machine that was terribly small and Morgan found himself having to run the dry cycle several times over just to get his sweaters to not be mildewy when they came out.

The living room was also small, though it fit their needs. Two couches and a sitting chair fit comfortably. A coffee table and a nice sized fireplace that was kept going to keep the flat warm. Two large casement windows filled the room with natural light through a diagonal grip that Morgan loved to trace with his fingers.

Three bathrooms and four bedrooms were somehow shoved into a weird and twisting corridor that was thin and dim from only a single light, but Morgan didn’t spend much time down there, save for the classroom.

Public schooling had been offered to Morgan, but he had decided against it. He didn't find he needed it. He didn't care about meeting many new people and books were far better company and anyone outside, save for Walter. And Morgan liked being taught by Hannibal, especially since he was about to go into medical school. Hannibal's intellect was invaluable.

"Where is your dad?" Hannibal asked, breaking up the silence and causing Morgan to turn around and lean against the counter with another bite of his apple.

Morgan shrugged. "He went to Loch Ness today," Morgan recalled. "He probably won't be home until after dinner. You know how he gets when he's at the lake. Not to mention it's been raining, so traffic is bound to be a-" Morgan hesitated at Hannibal's warning look and quickly corrected the trajectory of the sentence, "-pain in the neck."

How had Walter always gotten away with swearing? He had never been scolded for it all while it was drilled into Morgan's head that swearing was lazy and uncultured. Morgan despised the way he was held at such a different standard than the boy who was away finishing up school to be a university professor.

The profession was tame for what Morgan thought Walter would aim for. Morgan had always seen Walter as the daring one, the one who liked the challenge, who made his life hard on purpose just so he would have something fun to do.

After his broken leg, Morgan had watched Walter dig himself into his soccer. He played so often that Morgan could still hear the ball being kicked against the wall in his room deep into the night while he watched.

Walter had played on multiple teams. Rec and comp until he hit high school and made the team. And Morgan attended every game, sometimes practices if he had nothing else to do. And there were days of the week where Walter was gone as soon as school was out, going from practice to practice. Saturdays had consisted of two or three games until high school. But Walter always asked for Morgan to come and so he did and he made sure to record the games so that they could still watch them, even if they hadn't been able to physically attend.

It was mutually understood that it wasn't the fact that Will and Hannibal didn't want to be there, they just had to limit how often they were in public. But they were always ready to be gathered around Morgan's phone when they got home.

And when he came home, Walter did his homework without fail no matter how tired he was. Then it was chores and hand to hand with Morgan, though Morgan was able to take down Walter far more easily on days where Walter did have practice. Morgan wanted to believe that he was getting better, but he chalked it up to Walter being too burnt out.

Morgan had watched Walter work hard in school as well, creating more unnecessary challenges and somehow having the energy between soccer and fights at school to graduate a year early. Hannibal had helped when asked and Morgan had been on the video calls on long and late nights when Walter did more work than he needed to.

And then as soon as high school was done, Walter had been whisked away with a sports scholarship and stayed in Italy while Morgan continued to move away again and again and again, unable to go to any more of Walter's games. The video calls had become less and less until there weren't any at all, the night apart making it nearly impossible for Morgan to sleep. It got easier the longer they were apart, but Morgan couldn't remember any night being restful in the last seven years.

And now, this was where they were. Walter was nearly done with his doctorates in mathematical statistics and probability and his teaching license. Or at least that was the last thing Walter had told Morgan he was studying. But the last time the boys had spoken was when Walter had a nervous breakdown and called Morgan, wasted at a party, saying he was going to quit school and play sports professionally as he had been offered a position on a team.

But as far as Morgan knew, the older boy had turned down the position. Or at least that's what he had overheard Will say in a conversation that Morgan wasn't meant to be privy to. Walter had a teaching position at his own alma mater if he so wanted it. Top of his class and all that.

"Do you like rosemary, *kleiner hase* ?"

Morgan blinked as he was yanked from his thought and shook his head to clear it. He looked up at Hannibal who had more wrinkles across his face with his age, most of them smile lines and crinkles around his eyes. His hair was nearly all grey now and he wore glasses when he wanted to read, though never in front of Morgan.

Hannibal simply held the texts closer to his face in class. Morgan was more than well aware of how much Hannibal despised having his body deteriorate on him, not that glasses were all that big of a deal. Will had been wearing glasses as long as Morgan had known the man and Will didn't seem too bogged down by them, but Hannibal... Hannibal had been in a rut for months after being forced to get a pair by Will.

"You know I don't like rosemary," Morgan replied with a tip of his head, unsure where Hannibal's question had come from until it finally clicked. He had missed something. "I'm sorry. What did you say before that?"

"Have you thought about which school you would like to go to? You graduate next year."

Morgan chewed on his bottom lip and gave a shrug, before throwing away his apple core that had made his fingers sticky. "I was looking at John Hoppkins," Morgan replied softly, more feeling than seeing Hannibal's eyes jump to his face, obviously disapproving of the idea. "I want to see Baltimore again. And you went there."

"I would advise against it."

Morgan gave a small nod, fingers tapping on the counter. "I could always go to Harvard, or Stanford, I guess. We could afford it."

"You could get a scholarship like your brother. Personal success is a far better accomplishment than your dad and I handing you things."

"He's not my brother," Morgan grumbled, pushing away from the counter and heading to the pantry, pulling it open boredly and looking through it. "And I'm not exceptionally good at anything. Not anything to get me a full ride like Wally."

"You do not have to play a sport to get a scholarship," Hannibal pointed out as he washed some cranberries off in the sink before adding them to a pot on the stove. "And do not touch that Cognac. I've seen you eyeing it."

Morgan groaned, head falling back. "Why can't I drink yet?"

“You’re not old enough.”

“I'm seventeen,” Morgan shot back.

“Barely,” Hannibal answered with a small laugh. “Next year, *kleiner hase.* We will have whatever you would like to try.” Clamouring footsteps outside of the door on the staircase pulled Morgan from the pantry curiously. “That might be your dad.”

Morgan frowned at the implication that multiple sets of feet brought. “Did he bring home Oliver again?”

“It would be rude if he brought that man by again. His company is disagreeable at best.”

The door was struggling to be unlocked and Morgan decided to help it along. He unlocked the door and opened it up. There was a rush of a person and Morgan was snatched from his feet and thrown over someone’s shoulder with surprising ease.

“Happy birthday!” a voice said as Morgan was spun around, the floor dizzying.

Morgan’s hands clutched at the fabric of a dark shirt for balance and he laughed, chest warm as realization set in. “Put me down, Wally.” Morgan was lowered to his feet, but pulled into a headlock, knuckles being rubbed into his hair and messing it up. “Wally!” Morgan gave another laugh, lightly pushing at Walter’s grip, but not doing much more to get out of it. “What are you doing here?”

“It’s your birthday, Einstein. Why would I miss that?” Walter’s grip loosened on a hard pull from Morgan, the momentum sending Morgan tumbling to the floor. Walter chuckled and held out a hand that Morgan took with a bright smile. He was pulled to his feet, finally face to face with Walter.

Morgan’s eyes roamed the stranger who brought a warmth into the house, blocking out the rain that was outside. Walter had a lean shape and well-defined muscles under the t-shirt he wore. Long legs, powerful thighs under his shorts. Athletic and strong. And hands that were gentle in everything they did despite the disastrous things Morgan had seen them do in the past; the white scar in his palm was one such indicator. But what struck Morgan the most were the black gauges in Walter’s ears and how much of Walter was decorated with ink that hadn’t been there the last time Morgan had seen him.

“When did you get all this done?” Morgan asked, tipping his head to the side as he tried to pick apart the details on a sleeve and then some random patchwork art on his legs. From what was visible from under the shirt sleeve that obviously carried higher, Morgan’s eyes wandered a cuff of intricate geometric patterns that were sharp and forcefully angled.

Below it looked like the striped roof of a circus tent whose stripes turned into fingers that gripped the top of a cracking skull with hollowed eyes, giving it a menacing appearance. Abstract shapes and lines weaved down Walter’s arm, creating a sense of movement and energy until it reached the top of his hand that had a delicate pattern of violently edged flower petals that Morgan realized were made of knives.

The opposite wrist held a series of intricate symbols and runes etched into the skin, each one carefully crafted with precise lines. The symbols seemed ancient and mysterious, hinting at hidden meanings that Morgan wished to know the meaning behind.

His legs were painted similar designs that continued the theme. Smaller, bold tattoos, each one a standalone piece but still part of the overall aesthetic. Geometric shapes and abstract patterns blending with more traditional imagery.

“Here and there. I can show you later,” Walter answered, a strong hand ruffling Morgan's hair and Morgan laughed again, pushing Walter’s hand away. “Tonight is about you.”

“I thought you had finals to study for.” Morgan’s smile didn’t dim as he blindly tried to fix his hair that had grown out a little from the last time that Walter had seen him.

Morgan was a little less put together than Walter remembered him being, but he supposed that they both changed in the time they were apart. He still wore a dress shirt and pants, but there was no stupid sweater vest or tie and his sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, top few buttons undone. Something more relaxed and it was nice to see it from the kid.

“Aren’t they this week?”

“Next week,” Walter corrected with a shrug. “I can afford to let up on studying, I’m going to pass just fine. They’re nothing I don’t already know. Plus, your birthday is far more important than some stupid tests.”

Morgan’s heart about broke at the idea of tests that were deciding Walter’s future as being considered stupid. “Don’t say that.”

“You can’t put the books away, can you?” Walter scolded with a playful smile. “Always stuck in school mode.” Walter’s index finger tapped against Morgan’s temple. Morgan swatted at the hand. “Oh, Einstein,” Walter said in a forgetful way, breaking their gaze to turn around. “You remember Isotta.”

Morgan had been so caught up in his reunion that he had failed to recognize anyone else stepping into the apartment. His eyes fell on a woman that Walter took the hand of and pulled closer. She was a plain thing, nothing much to look at, Morgan noted. Something logical for Walter to keep around for appearances. Dark hair that looked like pencil lead and dull blue eyes that held no life in them. A drawn mouth that looked like frowning was its favorite habit.

Normally Morgan forgot the names of the women that Walter brought home, a new person dragged along behind Walter every time he came to visit. Never the same one twice. All women of the same type. Dull, able to blend in, hid him in society the way he needed to be hidden if anyone was looking for him. But this girl was different. Walter had never brought the same person home twice and something heavy dropped in Morgan’s chest as the awareness set in.

This meant something. She meant more than the others. Walter was just getting serious with someone. It wasn’t that big of a deal. And maybe Walter did care for the girl, though Morgan doubted it. Relationships were not something that either of them dealt in. Or at least, that was how Walter had been before university. Maybe Walter did more than deal with relationships. Morgan silently came to the conclusion that Walter was most likely far more experienced than the poor introvert who had hoped to see only Walter today.

Morgan’s insides turned hot and he did his best not to frown. Was he jealous? No. That wasn’t it. Maybe he was just getting sick.

“ *È bello rivederti, Isolde,” (It's good to see you again, Isolde,* ) Morgan greeted, holding out his hand to her. She took his grip with a single flimsy shake and seized her hand back. Morgan’s eyes flickered up to Walter’s face where a flash of an expression was there and then gone before Morgan could exactly place it.

“Your Italian is very good,” the woman said, accent thick and English difficult to understand. Her arm wrapped around Walter’s middle, pulling him closer, as if claiming him. Morgan’s muscles tensed and he inhaled deeply, plastering a smile on his face. “But it is Isotta, not Isolde.”

“ *Grazie* ,” Morgan muttered dully, not caring about the name correction. He moved past Walter and to the island where his parents were sharing frequent kisses while they worked on dinner together. Will had improved greatly over the years, though he still burned the bacon and left shells in the eggs sometimes. “You both knew, didn’t you?” Morgan asked as he leaned up against the island to watch his parents work.

“First birthday present of the night,” Will replied with a smug smile.

“You didn’t even go out to the lake, did you?” Morgan asked, the feeling of being offended softening quickly when a hand rested on his hip, Walter’s thumb infuriatingly gentle as it rubbed into the fabric of his shirt. “You spent the day in Venezia without me. That’s not very nice.”

“You had studies to attend to,” Hannibal reminded, pointing to Morgan with the knife he held. “And we discussed this. No trips until summer break. You have finals to worry about as well.”

“Wally didn’t-”

“You can visit me when you’re done,” Walter assured, once more messing with Morgan’s hair. Morgan smacked his hand away with a frown and Walter chuckled. “You haven’t changed, Einstein.”

“One of us had to stay the same,” Morgan whispered, swiftly moving on before Walter had a chance to ask what was meant. “I can come see you?” Morgan hated the way the hope of visiting Walter turned to irritation at the girl still curled into Walter’s side.

“We can take a gondola ride under the Ponte di Rialto and then-”

“Could we see the Ca' Rezzonico?” Morgan interrupted, eyes bright with the idea.

Walter gave a faux frown. “I don’t know what you like so much about that stuffy old building.”

“It is the perfect representation of Venetian life in the Rococo period,” Morgan defended. “Do you have any idea how long ago that building was built? It was made in-”

“-1660 by Baldassare Longhena, the *greatest* Baroque architect in Venezia,” Walter said mockingly over the top of Morgan with a small smile. “You only talk about it every time we mention Italy.” Morgan could feel a slight blush come to his cheeks at the realization that Walter actually listened to his rantings about Italian architecture. Cared enough to remember what he liked. “Though, I don’t know why that one impresses you when we can see St. Mark’s Basilica that was built in-”

“1092,” Morgan muttered with a small nod. “You know I am not one for religious relics.”

“You’d still come with me to Vatican City if I offered.”

“There’s more there than religious things to look at there,” Morgan clarified. Walter gave a huff of laughter and once more messed with Morgan’s hair. “Stop that,” Morgan ordered, hitting at Walter’s hand again.

Walter stopped and sniffed the air as Hannibal set the food on the island, everything sitting proudly and steaming hot. “That smells so good,” Walter complimented. “I’ve missed your cooking.” He leaned over to place a kiss to the neglected girl’s cheek. “ *Non ha un buon odore?* ” ( *Doesn't it smell good?* ) he asked Isotta who gave a small nod but didn’t look impressed.

“Speaking of smells,” Hannibal said as he began plating the first dish, red eyes flicking up to Walter disapprovingly. “Do we need to discuss your new habit?”

Morgan glanced sideways at Walter and smelt at the air, unable to find anything over the herbs that had been used. But Hannibal had always had an amazing sense of smell. He had been able to tell when Morgan snuck out one time simply because of the smell of his shirt when Hannibal had done laundry. Morgan had been grounded to being outside instead of holed up in his room with his books, being outside far more of a punishment.

“It’s nothing,” Walter defended with a frown. “I can stop no problem. It’s just to help with the stress of finals. I’m quitting as soon as they’re over.”

“You smoke?” Will asked, voice dark.

“It was like one pack,” Walter said with a shrug, brow furrowed with a slight bit of anger.

Morgan could see Isotta shift uncomfortably at the argument that was starting. Hannibal stepped around the island and Morgan pulled out of Walter’s grip and out of Hannibal’s way. Hannibal wasn’t shy as he reached into Walter’s pockets and emptied them onto the counter, no protest from Walter, though he made a show of rolling his eyes.

Wallet, keys, headphones, phone, pack of cigarettes littered the counter.

“I’m old enough to smoke if I want to,” Walter grumbled, reaching out for his things, but Hannibal snatched up the pack of cigarettes and gave Walter a warning look. “Give them back.”

“You can stop no problem?” Will challenged, arms folded over his chest.

Walter sighed and Morgan blinked curiously at how Walter had given up the fight. Morgan wasn’t sure he had ever seen Walter not throw a few punches even over the stupidest, smallest things. To see him back down so quickly was strange.

Hannibal took the confiscated pack and pulled a new knife from a knife block, a cleaver with a large blade. He put the pack onto a cutting board and the cleaver came down with a sound so loud that it made everyone in the room but Will jump. The pack was split in half and Morgan thought the act a little dramatic, but everything, the pack, the knife and the cutting board were thrown into the trash with a loud thud, just to make sure the point got across.

“So, Isotta,” Will said in an attempt to lighten the mood as Hannibal went back to plating. The room slowly set back into a nicer atmosphere as Walter shoved his things back into his short’s pockets “Walter has told us that you are going into teaching as well. What are you wanting to teach?” Isotta smiled, much to Morgan’s surprise.

“How do you say, um, *letteratura per bambini?* ” she asked, everyone in the room clearly able to understand what she wanted to say, but Walter gave a smile and whispered the answer in her ear. She gave a small nod. “Children’s literature,” she repeated.

Morgan felt the snapped retort on his tongue before he could stop it. “So you read picture books all day?”

Walter’s hand quickly went to the back of Morgan’s head and his finger’s tangled into Morgan’s locks warningly before gently caressing the back of his head and teasingly shoved Morgan’s head forward. The action was so fluid, Morgan doubted that anyone but him would have noticed the way that Walter’s fingers seemed to linger in his locks.

“She wants to teach children to read,” Walter clarified, shooting Morgan a toothy smile as Morgan glared.

“You like children?” Will asked, leaning over onto the counter before being gently pushed out of the way by Hannibal.

“Boys, will you please set the table?” Hannibal asked, placing a kiss to Will’s temple before letting Will lean back against the counter.

“I adore children,” Isotta said, her hands clapping together in a way that made her look like a saint and Morgan just hated her even more. Was hate the right word? He didn’t really know her, but he had always thought himself a decent judge of character. Yes. Hate was the right word. “I can’t wait to have some of my own. A darling blonde girl and a messy little boy.”

Morgan froze, eyes on Isotta. His sleeve was tugged and his eyes snapped back to Walter who nodded at Morgan to help him set the table, not knowing where anything was located in the apartment. Morgan bit his tongue and went to one of the cupboards, opening it and pulling a stack of plates free before shoving them into Walter’s waiting hands.

Will gave a chuckle. “It sounds like you have it all figured out.”

Morgan fetched several wine glasses and a normal cup, knowing he wasn’t going to be allowed near anything that Hannibal paired with the meal. Morgan was reaching for the last wine glass when Isotta’s answer reached him.

“Walter and I have been discussing it.”

Morgan’s hand slipped on the glass and it dropped, shattering on the floor and causing the room to go silent. Morgan could only stare at the backsplash on the wall, waiting for his father’s complaints and scolding to come at him for ruining a Waterford crystal glass that would require a trip to Ireland to replace, but no such remark came.

Instead, Morgan’s arms were snatched up by Walter’s concerned hands and he looked up to those brown eyes that held the golden rays of a setting sun in them. “Are you alright?” he asked, voice dripping with unease. Morgan gave a nod and Walter grinned, though it seemed forced. He rubbed at Morgan’s head again and Morgan let him. “Be more careful, Einstein. Those are expensive.” Morgan gave another absent nod and stepped over the glass to go get the broom to clean up.

“Things between the two of you are serious then,” Will said, pulling Isotta’s attention back to him. Morgan did his best to ignore her nod in answer.

“We were discussing...” she trailed off, head tipping side to side as she thought.

“ *Matrimonio* ?” Will offered and Morgan’s gut clenched painfully.

“ *Ah, si. Conosci anche l'italiano?”* she asked happily.

God, Morgan hated her. Wanted her to stop talking. The glass clinked as he swept it up and he had never wanted to slash someone's throat with broken crystal so badly before in his life than he did right now.

He threw it away over the top of Walter’s cigarettes before returning the broom to its home, listening to the easy Italian chatter the Morgan wished he had never been forced to learn and understand.

He didn’t want to know about how she wanted her wedding colors to be white and a ridiculous cherry blossom pink because the pink would go with Walter’s complexion so beautifully. He didn’t want to know that she wanted to name her kids Elio and Marzia. He didn’t want to know how Walter had been looking for rings.

Though he was curious if the girl knew about all of Walter’s other partners. Every week there was a new girl that Morgan knew about. And Morgan was more than certain that Walter had slept with all of them, some of them in between the last time Morgan had seen Isotta and now. And not even that really bothered Morgan. It was that she was sticking her claws in him, claiming something that wasn’t hers.

Not that Walter belonged to Morgan in any sense, but Morgan knew Walter better. They had been together since Morgan could remember. Walter hadn’t always liked him, but they had become friends over time. Close friends when they moved to Venezia and Walter went to normal school. And Walter had always been so kind to him. It felt wrong that that kindness was now being passed onto someone else. Someone Morgan didn’t want around, but would have to deal with if he wanted to see Walter.

# Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

> “It’s my birthday!” Morgan reminded playfully to break the tension in the room. He picked up his fork hurriedly. “You just have to give into my every demand. I don’t make the rules.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The table was set and dinner was wonderful. It almost pissed Morgan off more that he had to share this night with some floozy who would not stop hanging on Walter like she was a nickel hooker in the red light district. Maybe Morgan was being too harsh, but he sure didn’t think so.

Walter had drunk nearly two glasses of wine and his cheeks were red with the alcohol that was being chased down with two fingers of whiskey. He laughed, was slouched in his chair, arm around Isotta to keep her tucked into his side. And his lips were swollen and used from stealing her kisses, from placing kisses shamelessly to her cheeks and temples. Morgan’s grip on his fork cut into his palm.

“Are you feeling alright, *kleiner hase* ?” Hannibal asked softly beside him. Morgan blinked, not realizing he had been staring, and he loosened his painfully tight grip on his fork, letting it softly clatter to the table, the noise hidden by more laughter from Will and Walter, Will doing fairly well with the present company, Morgan noted in annoyance. “You’ve barely touched your food.”

“Fine,” Morgan answered stickily, mouth dry. He reached out for his water and took a sip though it did nothing to rain on the desert that was his tongue. Morgan let out  a small growl, looking down at his plate when Walter nipped playfully at Isotta’s cheek and she squirmed in his tight grip. “I’m just not hungry.”

“Well, there will be plenty for you tomorrow,” Hannibal pointed out even though he didn’t have to. Morgan sighed as Hannibal’s hand took his shoulder and gave it a small squeeze. “I’ll let it slide this once, but you know better than to lie to me, *kleiner hase.* ”

“Hey, Einstein,” Walter said, catching Morgan’s attention. Morgan looked up to see Walter digging through Isotta’s handbag before holding out a wrapped gift across the small dining table. Morgan gave a confused look and took the gift from Walter’s hands. “Happy birthday. I hope you like it.” Walter set the bag back down by the legs of Isotta’s chair and turned his eyes intently on Morgan. Morgan looked over the poor wrapping job that could have only been from Walter and he felt a small smile tug at his lips. “Well, open it, Einstein. I don’t have all night.”

Morgan ripped at the wrapping paper haphazardly, the paper crinkling loudly as it fell away to reveal a rather thick and heavy book. The cover was fully red maroon, raised bands, elaborately golden gilt-decorated boards and spine, marbled endpapers. On the spine it read: HISTORY OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

Morgan's eyebrows furrowed and he tipped the book open to find beautifully hand drawn depictions of the abbey that was in England that they had seen once when they were very little. Morgan had always wanted to go back to try to read all of the grave stones, though it was impossible to do so. Most of them had been worn away with time and with people stepping all over them, why the graves were placed in the floor, Morgan wasn't exactly sure, but he felt a little sad that time had washed those people away to be nothing more than a different colored stone in the floor.

"That's Rudolph Ackermann's hand colored drawings and the history of the abbey," Walter explained with an excited smile.

Morgan flipped through several of the incredibly detailed pictures that he was sure both Hannibal and Walter could copy perfectly, though he never would be able to. He found all of the publication information at the front of the book and glanced up at Walter. "This is a first edition," he stated carefully, fingers suddenly wanting to be more gentle with the book. Walter simply gave a nod. "How much did this cost you?"

"It doesn't matter," Walter answered, his free hand dismissing the question with a wave before he picked up his glass and downed the rest of his whiskey. "All that matters is that you like it."

"O-Of course I like-I like it," Morgan stuttered out, the words lost to him as he continued to carefully flip through the pages like they belonged to the Book of Kells. "It's breathtaking."

"Good," Walter said proudly, obviously pleased with himself.

"It's not fair when a son out gifts the parents," Will said with a small chuckle. "Hannibal, do you want to tell Morgan what we got him?"

Morgan had to drag his eyes away from the book that he would have to look over in that window seal in the classroom while it rained. He met Hannibal's kind smile, the man's hands clasped under his chin in support as he leaned on the table.

"There's a stable in Lasswade," Hannibal started, eyes kind as he looked over his youngest son. "It's about twenty minutes from here. If you would like to go there tomorrow we can."

"A stable?" Morgan asked curiously, glancing around the room for a better answer, though no one spoke, not even Walter offered him a single shoulder shrug. "You got me a horse?"

Walter gave a snort. "Please tell me you got him one of those Shetland ponies or something."

Isotta looked lost and Will was wearing a gentle smile.

" *Gli hanno procurato un cavallo* ," Walter explained softly to his girlfriend. She gave a small nod in understanding, eyes wide at the explanation. Morgan couldn't help but note that she must not have come from a family with money.

"A Clydesdale," Hannibal answered and Morgan felt a smile come to his face.

"Why?" Morgan asked excitedly. "I haven't ridden since my mom would take me."

"We thought it would give you time to yourself," Will replied with a shrug. "Something to do without having to be around us constantly."

“We also thought that you would like to stay connected to your roots if you so choose,” Hannibal finished. “I would be more than happy to take you tomorrow.”

Morgan laughed in disbelief. “Yes.”

Morgan couldn’t remember Walter ever getting a gift like this when they were younger. Will’s and Hannibal’s gifts were always outlandish and overly expensive, but this was something else. The closest thing that Morgan could compare this to was his parents letting Walter stay behind while he was finishing high school and starting college instead of dragging him along to the Swedish mountains that had been their next home. They were far too cold for Morgan’s liking. Too much snow. Or perhaps he hated it because those were the excuses that Walter had used for not visiting.

“Walter, how about you help me pick up the table?” Will suggested, with a drink of his own whiskey. “Hannibal, would you like to get the dessert out?”

The three rose from the table and began to clear everything away and Morgan was very quickly left in an awkward silence with Isotta. He glanced around the room to where everyone else was working and licked his lips. Isotta took a small sip of her wine and avoided his eyes.

He had to try to be nice at least. If she was going to be part of their family.

“ *Da quanto tempo è stata la tua relazione? ” (How long has your relationship been?)*

“ *Cinque mesi. ” (Five months.)* Her words were bored.

Morgan tried not to let his thoughts get past his filter. Five months and they were already looking at rings and planning children? Morgan thought he was going to be sick if he didn’t change the subject.

“ *Hai un nome molto bello, ” (You have a very beautiful name,)* Morgan said kindly, closing his book and setting it carefully on the table. She gave a nod in thanks, but didn’t say anything. “ *È da quella leggenda celtica francese? Tristan e Iseult?” (Is it from that French Celtic legend? Tristan and Iseult?)*

“ *Non ho mai sentito parlare di quella storia, ” (I've never heard of that story,)* was her curt answer, obviously not wanting to speak to Morgan.

A frown took over Morgan’s lips and his eyes lowered to the table. “And you want to teach literature,” he grumbled under his breath, fist going to hold up his cheek as he pulled his new book closer to slowly flip through the pages again.

His gaze was pulled back up as a hand rested on his shoulder and a plate was set in front of him. He was met with Walter’s warm smile and Morgan couldn’t stop the faint smile that pulled at his lips, his chest lighter now.

“Wally, you need to draw me something soon,” Morgan stated as he closed his book and pushed it aside in favor of dessert.

“Do I?” Walter asked with a teasing lilt to his voice.

Morgan gave a nod. “It is my birthday after all.”

“Oh, I see,” Walter said with a knowing nod and a chuckle. “You want more gifts out of me.” Walter gave Morgan’s shoulder a tight squeeze that boarded on painful, and then stepped away to help serve the rest of the dessert. “What would you like me to draw?”

“Tristan and Isolde,” Morgan replied, voice a bit more cocky than he meant it. He could see Walter pause for a moment before he continued on, obviously picking up on the jab at his girlfriend, but he played along.

“John William Waterhouse’s?” Walter questioned, picking up another plate that Hannibal had finished and brought it over for Isotta, placing a kiss to her head before he went back to fetch the next plate.

“Rogelio de Egusquiza,” Morgan clarified, not missing the way Walter’s eyes snapped to his face. Morgan couldn’t place Walter’s expression though, it was hidden so carefully. He had hit a nerve however. That much was clear. And had caught the attention of Hannibal and Will, but Morgan ignored them.

“Alright, Einstein. I’ll draw it for you if you can-”

“It’s my birthday!” Morgan reminded playfully to break the tension in the room. He picked up his fork hurriedly. “You just have to give into my every demand. I don’t make the rules.” He dug into the slice of pie and shoved it into his with a smile at Walter who looked down with a dangerous chuckle. Morgan looked down at the food that he had so unceremoniously eaten and found a lemon icebox pie. Something he could remember his mother making once. Actually, maybe it was the three of them. Mom, mother, and him, all in the kitchen, making a pie. “This is amazing, father,” Morgan said stiffly as he took another bite, pushing the memory or dream or whatever it was away.

Everyone was settled back at the table with a mostly comfortable silence, singing happy birthday with candles not something that Morgan could ever remember them doing before. He thought he could recall candles and a cake for one of his birthdays when his mothers were alive though.

Morgan was content to let the rest of the night go on in this silence, but Walter broke it with a clearing of his throat. Morgan didn’t dare look up. Instead he stabbed at the pie crust and watched as it broke apart in a crumbling mess.

“Dad, father,” he said, his voice much more serious than it had been before. Morgan still didn’t look up, not when his parent’s attention went to Walter. “Are you busy next weekend?”

Hannibal and Will traded glances and Will shook his head. “Not as of yet. What is it?”

Walter inhaled deeply and it was like a pull on Morgan’s attention, eyes finally flickering up to the older boy. That soon to be teacher. Morgan gave a small smile at the idea. Walter dressed up in something nicer than his t-shirt and gym shorts that he always wore, at the front of a classroom with equations written on a board for the students to see.

The concept of math hadn’t been something that Morgan truly enjoyed and he had never once wanted to take idiotic statistics and probability, but he was certain that Walter would make even paint drying an interesting subject.

Maybe when he was older and could leave without his parents’ permission, he could sit in on one of those classes. Or maybe he could take one of Walter’s classes. Even if it was to just poke fun at

Walter after class had finished. Tell him his Italian was rusty even if it was perfectly fine. German would have been more of a challenge for Walter.

“We’re having an engagement party. I was hoping that you would be willing to come meet her family,” Walter answered, effectively crashing Morgan’s vision of a classroom and a teacher. Morgan felt his body turn cold and he didn’t think he could eat anymore. In fact, he was nearly certain that everything he had eaten would be coming back up shortly. “I know it’s short notice. I’m sorry.”

There was a stunned silence before Hannibal quickly picked up the ball and began running with it again. “Of course. We would be more than happy to meet her family. We’re very happy for you.”

“We’ll discuss the details more later,” Will assured with a small nod.

“I would like you to come too, Einstein,” Walter said kindly, looking over the younger boy who wasn't quite so young anymore.

Morgan would begin pulling away soon too. Going after his own dreams, whatever they were. Walter was pretty sure that Morgan wanted to be a surgeon or something in the medical field. The kid would have a lot of work ahead of him, but Walter knew Morgan could do it. Morgan had always been so much smarter than him.

Morgan was book smart, so utterly brilliant and Walter had to make up for it with hard work. His smarts lied in the street, not the classroom. He found it funny himself that he had picked to be a teacher of all things. He supposed he could figure out his reasoning later. Right now, he was far more concerned with the sick look on the kid’s face.

“You don’t have to, Einstein. If you have plans or something, I understand,” Walter assured, hoping it would bring the light back to Morgan’s eyes.

“Excuse me,” Morgan muttered, pushing his half finished plate aside and rising from his chair. He cleared his throat as he left the table and disappeared from the room, heading towards the hallways that Walter had yet to explore.

Walter looked to his parents for an answer, brows furrowed in question. Will gave a small shrug, but Hannibal’s expression was blank, hinting to Walter that there was some secret Hannibal wasn’t telling them.

“Last room, *Mangustėli,”* Hannibal said and it was all Walter needed to get from the table and give a half-assed apology to Isotta.

The hallway curved into odd angles until Water found the very last door at the end of it. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes, resting his head against the door for a moment, listening to what lay beyond the wood.

He hadn’t thought that Isotta’s presence would upset Morgan as much as it had. He hadn’t thought that having to split his time between the two of them would set Morgan off like it had. In fact, this was the most emotion that he had seen Morgan provide in a long time, Morgan seeming more robot than person on a good day.

And his time wouldn’t be that divided. He would still come to visit. The distance between them was only a three hour plane ride currently and Walter had the means to visit Morgan at college,

wherever the kid decided to go. They could plan to meet up once a month on the dot. Maybe that wasn't quite enough, but Walter wasn't really sure anymore. He had always tried to be there for Morgan, but he needed to make this move in his life. It was important.

He had to start setting up a family. It would keep him safe. It was his protection. He had to blend in. And Isotta was a kind person, one of the few that Walter had found he could stand while at school. And the best part was she wasn't the brightest crayon in the box. She wasn't stupid, but she didn't notice the small details which was exactly what Walter needed.

She would be distant and not bother to question Walter if something happened that he had to take care of in a less than legal sense. It had been a long time since he had needed to do anything of the kind, but as sure as the sun rose every day, he knew one day it would come back to him. Something was always waiting on the horizon.

Not to mention that this might be his chance at normal. He wanted a family, wanted to have a stable home with someone to come home to. It might be the closest he ever came to it. Surely Morgan could understand that.

Walter took the door handle and turned it, pushing the door open. He wasn't sure what he was expecting to find, but a classroom was not it. A single desk covered with open text books and scattered notes, a blackboard that was smudged with erased chalk, book shelves holding more books crammed into the shelves than in the Library of Congress.

In the corner of the room were blue mats and Walter could nearly hear the slam of a body hitting them. So, Morgan was still having all of this drilled into his head. It sat uncomfortably in Walter's chest. He had tried so hard to keep as much of this away from Morgan as he could and he had failed yet again to protect the kid.

Walter closed the door, the room dim from the only light being the window. His head tipped to the side with a sigh at the form of Morgan sitting in a window seat, knees pulled up to his chest, the streetlamps painting him in a golden glow. He could hear the world still turning below and it only reminded Walter that he didn't have long before he needed to beat traffic to the airport to catch his flight.

Walter moved across the room and to the window, looking out at the road below through the rain-blurred glass. There were umbrellas everywhere, creating a look of dancing colors in the streetlights.

"This place is really beautiful," Walter said, causing Morgan to jump as if he hadn't noticed Walter enter the room.

Walter took a seat next to Morgan's feet and took in the younger's face, trying to read the expression that was there, but Morgan's face was as blank as Hannibal's liked to be. Walter stayed silent, waiting for Morgan to speak, but Morgan didn't do anything more to acknowledge him, simply looked back out the window. Walter hesitantly reached out and took one of Morgan's knees, giving it a squeeze.

"I really do want you to come next weekend," he said, trying to keep his voice and smile light. Morgan's winter sky blue eyes, a blue light that got lost as it was scattered much like the light that created the sky or the depths of the ocean, flickered briefly to Walter's face before leaving again. "I'll take you to see the Ca' Rezzonico. I won't even complain." Walter gave a small laugh, but Morgan didn't react. Walter licked at his lips, nervousness setting in. "Are you upset with me?"

Morgan's head shake was so small that Walter nearly missed it.

"Will you come next weekend?"

Another shake of his head was Walter's answer. Morgan lowered his feet to the floor and Walter pulled his hand back from Morgan's knee, looking over his best friend. He put another smile on his face despite the fact that it felt horribly fake to him.

"Come on, Einstein." He nudged Morgan's shoulder with his own. Morgan's body waved like tall grass in the wind and eventually came to a stop. "Come spend the weekend with me. It would mean a lot." Morgan shook his head and Walter sighed. "Will you at least talk to me, please? I've been looking forward to seeing you all day."

Morgan's voice was broken when he spoke, eyes downcast. "You have?"

"Yeah." Walter chuckled nervously, running a hand through his hair. He hoped he was finally getting somewhere. "Why wouldn't I be excited to see you? I miss you."

"You do?"

Walter's snort brought Morgan's eyes to his face. "Of course I do, Einstein." He snatched Morgan into a headlock and Morgan pulled against it. "You're my best friend. Am I going to have to start calling you something else? Did you stop being smart all of a sudden?"

"Let go," Morgan ordered coldly, but Walter didn't ease up.Walter simply messed up Morgan's hair once more, noticing the wavy locks having turned a little lighter, a little more golden in the summer sun.

"Not until you agree to come visit me next weekend."

"Let go!" Morgan repeated heatedly, pulling harder at Walter's hold. The hostility in Morgan's tone wasn't lost on Walter and he let Morgan go. Morgan jumped to his feet, breathing hard, blue eyes angry when they turned their undivided attention onto Walter. "I am not going anywhere near that city!"

Walter stared in confusion and slowly got to his feet. "Why?" He took a step closer to Morgan who matched it with an equal step back. "You don't like Venezia?"

"It's not that," Morgan muttered, rubbing at his elbow under his dress shirt.

"Is it because I made fun of the museum?" Walter was searching for anything to be the cause. Anything at all he could apologize for to end the stress between them. He hated fighting with Morgan. "I was kidding."

"No." Morgan shook his head and hunched his shoulders, trying to make himself smaller, Walter's dark eyes burning his skin in their stare.

Walter gave a knowing sigh, shoulder slumping. "Is it because of Isotta?" he questioned, not needing to know the answer. Morgan had been weird since Isotta had been introduced, but why? Morgan shrunk back without a word, gaze stuck on the floor, glued there. Walter took a step closer, cautiously reaching out, but Morgan pulled back before Walter could reach for him. "Are you jealous?" Morgan shook his head vigorously. "Yes, you are."

“No,” Morgan disagreed softly.

“She’s not taking your place, Morgan,” Walter said gently, doing his best to approach the subject as kindly as he could. Morgan’s eyes darted up and clung to Walter a little longer this time before he looked away with a shake of his head. “I’ll still come to visit you. We can still video chat at night and I love reading your letters. You’re probably the only weirdo in the whole world that still writes letters.” There was a small smile on Morgan’s lips before it was washed away. “Just because we’re getting married doesn’t mean that you’re going to be pushed away, Morgan.”

Morgan tensed up at the words and Walter wished he could take them back, though he wasn’t exactly sure which part had made Morgan close back up.

“Why are you so jealous? You’ve never acted like this around any of my other friends or girlfriends I’ve brought over.” Walter gave an exasperated sigh, hands tapping at his thighs as he racked his brain for an answer to this situation. “What is it about her that has you so worked up? Isotta is a really nice person. She works hard and she will be a good wife and a good mother. And she will-”

Something in the air snapped, something strained that Walter hadn’t grasped the full weight of until that moment. Something that told Walter that Morgan couldn’t handle the conversation anymore.

The front of Walter’s shirt was snatched up and he was tugged aggressively forward, a warmth against his mouth. Walter blinked into the dim room that was suddenly so much clearer than it had been, as if the light that had finally turned on in Walter’s head had lit up the room.

Morgan pulled back, breaking this kiss, his fists still holding tightly to the fabric in them. He breathed hard, eyes searching Walter’s surprised features for any sign of rejection. He found none. Just pure astonishment “Shut the fuck up,” he ordered between gasps. “You always make things worse with your words. Did you know that?”

Morgan leaned forward again and when Walter didn’t pull away, he captured Walter’s lips back up and to Morgan’s relief and racing heart, Walter didn’t fight. The room was still for a beat before Walter’s hands moved, given the permission that had been denied to them for so long.

Morgan’s arms were grabbed, the movement sharp and strong. Morgan’s back slammed against the nearest wall and he gasped for air from the shock, unable to find any as Walter kissed him back.

Morgan’s knees went weak and his eyes rolled back as Walter’s tongue trailed over his bottom lip before slowly licking into his mouth. Morgan’s body tensed at the intrusion and he couldn’t stifle the moan that escaped his lips at the sensation. It was dizzying. There were so many tastes that were left on Morgan’s tongue that he couldn’t place through the haze that was covering his mind. A haze he had never experienced before, something so calming about not having to think for a few seconds.

A hint of something bitter was there though, something chemical and thick. Smoke, nicotine, a bad habit that needed to be kicked. And then wine and whiskey. Something earthy and sweet and charred, intoxicating and Morgan wished that it were possible to get secondhand drunk from Walter’s kiss.

Walter broke the kiss, leaving them both struggling for air. He couldn’t help the smirk that covered his lips at the sight of the younger boy undone in his grip, lips so obviously abused, hair a mess of dark and light waves.

“Have you ever been kissed before?” Walter asked, causing Morgan’s eyes to snap open and greet Walter with a dazed look. Morgan shook his head and Walter gave a huff of laughter with a smug grin. “Would you like to be kissed again?” The sharp breath from Morgan was answer enough. Walter leaned over, pressing his lips against Morgan’s forehead. Morgan shivered, leaning into the touch. Walter’s hands cupped Morgan’s face, bringing Morgan to look up at him. “I want to hear you say it.” Morgan shook his head and Walter tutted him. “Be a good boy and ask me. Don’t you want to be my good boy?”

“Kis-Kiss me,” Morgan answered brokenly and it only made Walter’s smile grow at how readily Morgan gave in. Morgan licked at his lips and then pulled them between his teeth, eyes shut tightly. “Please.”

“Good boy.”

The praise shot a shiver through Morgan that was only amplified by the kiss finally given to him. Morgan’s aching fingers released the fabric and went to Walter’s dark hair, tangling in the locks that were far silkier than Morgan would have guessed. Teeth latched onto Morgan’s bottom lip and a gasp left him, his chest feeling like it was going to come apart, rip open with how hard his heart and lungs were working to keep him conscious.

Walter hummed appreciatively and kissed at the corner of Morgan’s lips. He held Morgan still as he placed kisses to the younger boy's soft cheeks and temples before placing a chaste kiss to Morgan’s kiss stained lips.

“Wa-Walter,” Morgan stuttered out as those smoldering lips kissed down his jaw line. Morgan licked his lips and his head tipped back naturally, baring his throat. There was a sharp pain at his pulse point and Morgan’s body collapsed in on itself without his permission, knees giving out under him.

Walter’s hands snatched up Morgan’s hips, keeping him in place against the wall as his teeth continued to mark Morgan’s neck in lacey purples and reds. The back of his shirt was clenched tightly in a strong grip as he put the barest of space between them.

“Can you show me where you’re feeling this, Morgan? Tell me what I’m doing to you,” Walter instructed, enjoying the blush that was brought to Morgan’s cheeks. Morgan’s shiver graced Walter when he nipped just below Morgan’s ear. “Be good for me.”

“Here,” Morgan breathed, one of his hands unlocking from Walter’s shirt and touching his chest before it dropped to Walter’s forearm as if it was too heavy to hold itself.

Walter gave a crooked smile and pressed his hand flat against Morgan’s chest, Morgan’s heart racing under his palm. “Here?” Walter clarified as he pressed a peck to Morgan’s lips that the boy chased after. Walter chuckled and let the boy have the kiss, enjoying the way Morgan’s breath caught in his chest. “Where else?”

Morgan’s hand trembled as it took Walter’s wrist and slowly lowered it to his abdomen. “There's something tight here,” he whispered, barely audible. Walter laughed, continuing to kiss Morgan without hesitation. Morgan squirmed under the touch.

“Anywhere else?”

Morgan inhaled deeply through his nose and gave a frustrated sound from his throat that only made Walter grin more, grip on Morgan's hip tightening possessively

"Lower," Morgan answered.

"Show me," Walter ordered with a cavernous hunger behind the words that made Morgan ache deeply.

Morgan's brutally shaking grip on Walter's wrist slowly obeyed. Walter's strength was the only thing keeping Morgan from falling apart at the seams, splitting open and crawling out of his skin and it didn't seem like Walter minded. Morgan led Walter's hand down lower, feeling the tips of their fingers on the waistline of his slacks, but a knock at the door shattered the air around them.

Walter jumped back, heart pounding painfully in his chest as fear shot through him. Morgan was left feeling cold, breathing hard and unable to stand. He slid down the wall and to the floor, staring up at Walter who shrunk back with a panicked look across his normally sunny face.

"Walter, you're going to miss your flight. It's time to go," Will's voice called from the other side of the door. His footsteps sounded away and the room fell into a thick silence, both boys unmoving, but grateful that Will hadn't entered the room.

"Wally?" Morgan asked after a moment of harsh breathing stillness.

"That never happened," Walter said firmly, stepping further away from Morgan. Morgan's heart sunk in his chest and he slowly pushed himself onto shaky knees, confusion the only emotion he could feel. "Just forget it, ok?"

"What?"

It was the only word that Morgan could form as his pleasantly hazy mind flipped back into an abruptly active state. The room felt disorienting and smaller than before, closing in around him.

Walter's steps were sturdy as he bolted for the door. "I'm getting married, Morgan. This didn't happen."

"Don't marry her."

Walter froze at the echoing words. He swallowed at the lump in his throat that didn't go away. "What?" He couldn't keep the surprise from his voice.

"Stay here." Morgan got to his feet, using the wall to steady him to the point he could walk, but as soon as Walter tensed at the movement, Morgan stopped in hopes that he didn't make the situation any worse than it already was. "Stay with me. You can teach here and I can find a local university. We can-"

"No." Walter's voice was cold and harsh, a tone that Morgan couldn't remember having been directed at him before. "You're my brother, Morgan. This is sick and wrong."

Morgan could only stare at Walter's back, his mouth falling open before he could stop it. He felt like he was choking on the air around him, suffocating.

"My whole life we aren't brothers and the moment we-"

“Of course we’re brothers, Morgan.” It was said in a convincing sort of tone, but Walter wasn’t exactly sure who he was trying to convince. “We’ve been brothers since that weekend we were dumped in the woods.”

“But Wally-”

“Forget this,” Walter instructed bitterly. “Be smart for once, Einstein.”

Morgan licked his lips, mouth dry. But his eyes weren’t. They burned with tears that he absolutely was not going to allow to fall. Anger was brilliantly hot, the emotion raw and fresh, something that Morgan could usually hold back, bite down on, but not now. Not when he was rattled to his core and ripped open for Walter to see and use however he wanted. Dissected open so carefully by Walter’s lips and words.

“Clean yourself up. You look ridiculous.” Walter opened the door and left, slamming it behind him. Morgan started at the floor until there was another knock at the door and it was slowly opened.

“Walter is leaving,” Hannibal said as he entered the room. “Don’t you want to come say goodbye, *kleiner hase?* ”

Morgan wanted nothing more than to sink back into the shadows and never come out again. He never wanted to see the sun again. Nothing honey or golden ever again.

Hannibal closed the door after assuring Will’s distant voice that they would be out soon. He moved over to Morgan and his eyes took in the disheveled appearance of his son. Hannibal inhaled deeply and let out the breath softly, head tipped to the side with a kind look. Something so rare on the older man’s face. “Come here, *kleiner hase* .”

Morgan reached out and took Hannibal’s outstretched hand. Hannibal pulled him closer and into a tight hug, suit smelling like pine in a comforting sort of way. Morgan didn’t say anything, just let his father hug him for what was probably longer than a *be out in a moment* was meant to be.

Hannibal pushed Morgan back and straightened his hair, and then his shirt, buttoning up the collar to hide the bruising that was against Morgan’s fair neck.

“Face him,” Hannibal said gently.

Morgan gave an indignant snort and shook his head. “I just want him gone.”

Hannibal gave a small sigh and his hands rested on Morgan’s shoulders with a reassuring squeeze. “You stand tall and strong and he can’t hurt you, Morgan.”

“That’s easier said than done,” Morgan grumbled before stepping out of Hannibal’s grip. “Let’s get this over with. The quicker he leaves, the quicker I can get back to my life.”

Morgan left the room, unfolding his sleeves and pulling them down to button them, the extra fabric giving him some semblance of solidarity for him to cling to. He made his way into the living room and nearly crumbled back to the floor when he saw a kiss between Walter and the girl that Morgan didn’t want to think about. A hand on his shoulder caught him and Morgan inhaled deeply, letting Hannibal’s strength seep into his body.

“It was nice to see you,” Morgan said, stepping closer to the group of three by the door. “Have a safe flight.”

“Happy birthday, Einstein,” Walter said with a plastered on smile, hand reaching out to ruffle Morgan’s hair much more like an older brother would than the teasing it had been earlier. Morgan held back the want to bite at the hand that he didn’t want to touch him anymore. “Come visit when you can escape your studies.” Morgan didn’t miss the underlying timber that told Morgan to do the exact opposite of those words.

Morgan gave a small nod, playing his part dutifully. He then bid goodbye to the woman tucked into Walter’s side and Will followed them out to take them to the airport. Morgan stood tall until the front door shut and he slowly let himself fall to the middle of the floor, feeling like the walls around him were picking him apart.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me beta these two chapters!

# Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

> “Don’t make me jealous, Morgan.”
>
> “You’ve been doing that to me all night!”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A third cigarette from a new pack was down to the filter by the time the gates were ready to start boarding. Isotta was waiting inside of the terminal while Walter paced outside, breathing the burning smoke into his mouth and wishing the soothing effect the smoke used to have would come back. What he wouldn’t give for something harder.

The cigarette was smashed out with an annoyed look from Isotta through the window and Walter sighed, hands running through his hair. He stepped through the automatic doors and looked over the girl who he was, decidedly, making the worst mistake in his life with.

“I need to stay,” he said as apologetically as he could manage. “I got into a fight with my brother and I need to go back and fix it.”

“You’re not coming back?” Her arms that had been folded across her chest dropped to her sides and she looked around the airport as if the answer to why would pop up on the flight lists.

“I’ll be back in time for finals.” The words were noncommittal and he turned from her without another word, heading back out into the night. He stepped out into the rain that hadn’t stopped falling and jogged his way over to some cabs that were idling.

When the cab reached the flat about twenty minutes later, Walter dug through his wallet from some cash and paid before he found the hidden staircase that led to the flat. He raced up the steps two at a time and stopped at one of the doors on the corridor, turning the door handle. He wasn’t surprised to find it locked, not with the people who lived behind it.

He knocked and waited, bouncing lightly on his feet with a nervous energy winding through his system in the same way it did before a game. His body was ready to run until his legs wouldn’t carry him any further, giving all he had.

Footsteps made Walter’s heart tick up and the click of the lock sounded before the door was slowly opened. Walter was greeted with a confused look and a tip of a head.

“Dad, I messed up. I need to talk to Morgan.”

Will slowly stepped back and opened the door for Walter to step through. Walter entered the home, shaking out his wet hair.

“Where’s Isotta?”

“Went home.” There was no guilt in the words. Walter couldn’t bring himself to feel any. “Can I stay the night?”

“Of course,” Will answered with a nod as he locked the door again. “You can have the second door.”

Walter glanced around the small room that was shrouded in darkness, the only light from the hallway. He bit his bottom lip with a breath. “I didn’t mean to wake you,” he apologized. Will smiled and shook his head to dismiss the worry. “I’m sorry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for,” Will assured, pulling Walter into a tight hug. “I’m glad you came back. I’ve missed you. You don’t visit enough.” Walter gave a huff of laughter and hugged his dad back tightly. “Stop smoking. Hannibal’s going to smell it on you a mile away.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Walter excused, patting Will’s back and letting him go. “He can be as mad as he wants. I’m planning to quit when finals are over. I think switching from writing papers to grading them will be a much easier task.”

“That’s what you think,” Will said, stepping back with a kind smile. “We’re both very proud of you all the same. We’ve both seen the hard work you’re putting in.”

“Will?” a voice called from the hall and both turned to see Hannibal appear in the entrance. His eyes glanced over Walter for a moment, something disheartened in the gaze and Walter suddenly felt so very small under his father’s judgment. Hannibal knew. Morgan wouldn’t have had to say anything to Hannibal. Hannibal would just know. He had always been that way, as if he could summon the information from the air whenever he wanted to. “Are you coming back to bed?”

“Yes,” Will answered with a nod. “Just helping Walter get settled.”

“The boy is old enough to settle himself if he thinks he can keep smoking,” Hannibal said, though Walter knew that wasn’t where the anger lied. Hannibal cared far more over the boy who hadn’t appeared from his room than he did over whether or not Walter’s lungs were working correctly. Especially if it was self inflicted harm that could ruin his scholarship. “Come to bed, my love.”

Will looked between Hannibal and Walter for a moment before he followed Hannibal’s beckoning, always obedient. Hannibal kissed Will, an arm slipping pocessively around Will’s waist, but his eyes stayed trained on Walter who held his father’s gaze.

“Goodnight son,” Hannibal excused them, leading Will down the hall.

“Night,” Walter muttered, waiting until they had disappeared before he went for the second door that Will had mentioned.

He opened it and found a small room, something that reminded him of his room back in Wolf Trap. He closed the door behind himself, pulling his damp shirt over his head and setting it out to dry at the foot of the bed.

Walter collapsed onto the bed, pulling everything from his pockets and tossing them onto the bedside table. Morgan must have already been asleep if he hadn’t come to the living room with the noise. Walter would have to wait until morning to speak with him.

But Morgan couldn't sleep. The moment Hannibal had pulled him off of the floor and metaphorically dusted him off with words of encouragement, Morgan had gone to bed.

He lied in bed, feeling marginally better after a shower. He could only stare up at the ceiling in relative silence, though he had been able to hear shuffling and talking from who he had assumed were his parents outside of his room, which was normal. Both of them didn't sleep often, if they did at all.

Morgan had, on more than one occasion, walked out to get a glass of water and found the two of them tangled on the couch with glasses of wine, talking in hushed voices or reading. They never seemed upset with Morgan's interruptions either. Sometimes he was instructed to go back to bed and Hannibal would bring him whatever he needed and other times they would ask Morgan to join them. And more times still, they would be stitching each other up, from what, Morgan never wanted to ask.

Music wasn't abnormal either. Sometimes a piano lulled him to sleep, but the music he could hear now was different. Harsher than whatever Hannibal played around the house. Morgan sat up, curiosity stricken. It didn't sound like Will's music either. Not the old country that he only listened to when Hannibal was out of the house.

This was.... Rock? Classic rock.

Morgan climbed from his bed and opened his door, looking across the hall at the door in front of him. That bedroom had been empty since the moment they had moved into the flat, but there was music there now. And light.

Morgan stepped across the hall and reached for the doorknob to the room. He pushed the door open and was greeted with a cloud of bitter smelling smoke. Through the haze, he stared at the man who was meant to be on a plane and not laying on a bed in a flat in Scotland. But there he was, lit cigarette in his lips with his phone blasting a guitar solo.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Morgan asked before he could stop himself, the words sticky feeling just like whatever goo was in his chest.

Walter jumped upright, startled, but he relaxed with a sigh the moment his eyes found Morgan. He pulled the cigarette from his mouth, letting a breath out. The smoke filled the room, making it clouded and muggy and Morgan coughed as he tried to wave the assault away.

"At least open the window, you dipshit," Morgan hissed, walking past the bed to push open the dusty curtains and unlatch the window. He opened the panes of glass and the sound of rain filled the room, muting the music slightly. Morgan inhaled deeply of the night's rain that held a hint of oil in it from the streets. "Father's going to have your head if he knows you're smoking in the house."

"Long live the king," Walter taunted, taking a deep drag before letting out another cloud.

"That's disgusting," Morgan grumbled, keeping his back to Walter.

"You're still here though," Walter pointed out in a gentle voice, the sarcasm missing.

"You didn't answer." Morgan leaned out of the window with an outstretched arm, letting rain fill his hand before it slipped from between his fingers like a damn breaking. "What are you doing here?"

“Come sit?”

Morgan shook his head. He honestly wasn’t sure what he was still doing in the room after everything that had just happened. It was all shoved aside as if it had never taken place. Morgan bit his lip at the realization that this was normal between the two of them. A silent forgiving no matter the sin. A silent agreement to ignore the bad so that they could continue to enjoy the good; Morgan despised how even though his chest was aching with a laceration in it, he still wanted to be by Walter’s side.

Walter rose from the bed and cautiously placed himself next to Morgan, the summer night air cool from the rain. Walter flicked out the finished cigarette and both watched as the embers broke apart into orange, glowing sparks when it hit the sidewalk below before slowly going out from the rain.

Morgan’s eyes finally left the street and took in Walter who was placing a new stick between his teeth and clicking a lighter until a spark ignited the flame. The pack was closed and returned to a pocket with the lighter.

“Put it out,” Morgan ordered, causing Walter’s brows to rise in challenge. “Do you have a death wish? There are better ways to kill yourself. Ways that will make people weep instead of rolling their eyes.”

A muddy fog was blown directly into his face and Morgan did his best not to react despite the desperate want to cough. He blinked, eyes watering, but kept all the insults behind his teeth. His eyes met Walter’s who looked like he was waiting for some sort of reaction or discourse, and a faint disappointment covered his face when none came.

Instead, Morgan snatched the cigarette from Walter’s lips and placed it between his own, taking a step back when Walter reached for him.

“Don’t,” Walter warned.

“Do as I say, not as I do?” Morgan sneered. He inhaled deeply, unsure what exactly to expect but the taste of a mixture of asphalt and vanilla was not what he thought would be there. It was like a road had been used to bake cookies and Morgan had licked the road. He slowly released the held breath, ignoring the burning in the back of his throat and the instant desert on his tongue. Walter looked slightly impressed.

“I choked my first time,” Walter said, this time holding out his hand instead of reaching. “Give it back Morgan.”

“No,” Morgan argued, frown on his face. Walter lowered his hand. “For every one you smoke, I’m going to smoke one. You’re not giving up seven minutes without me. Now, where’s your pack?” Morgan held out his hand, palm up. “I have a lot of ground to make up. We’ll have to stop at the store and pick up more tomorrow after we discuss how long you’ve been doing this.”

Walter pinched the bridge of his nose, with a heavy exhale. “Alright. You’ve made your point.” Morgan shook his head and took another drag, the heat in his mouth and lungs unpleasant. “Morgan, stop that.”

“I told you,” Morgan stated firmly, jumping back when Walter tried to grab him again. “I’m not letting you waste your seven minutes. You give that up, then I do too.”

“That’s not funny, Morgan.”

“I’m not trying to be funny.” Morgan inhaled again and Walter finally seized the cigarette from Morgan’s fingers, tossing it out the open window. He turned back to Morgan with a clenched jaw. Morgan didn’t feel one ounce of guilt as he simply blew his mouthful of smoke at Walter like Walter had done earlier. Walter blinked through the onslaught. “Get rid of the rest of the pack. I’m not kidding,” Morgan said. “I will start smoking if you don’t stop.”

“You’re such a fucking stubborn ass.” But Walter pulled the pack from his pocket all the same, holding it out to Morgan who snatched it up. Morgan stepped back to the window and opened the pack, pulling one out to snap it in half. “Why are you always like this?”

The question was ignored as Morgan pulled out the next one, giving it the same fate as the first before tossing it from the window and out into the wet street.

Morgan’s eyes fluttered shut as a hand slid across the small of his back and Walter’s hand took his hip. It was a touch that Morgan was used to, nothing new between them, but it lit up his chest as if he had still had the cigarettes. Morgan shook his head to clear it and elbowed Walter’s bare chest.

“Don’t touch me,” Morgan snapped harshly, breaking the last cigarette in two and letting it fall to be with the others. “I’m still mad at you.” He turned to see Walter’s head tipped to the side, an emotion in Walter’s eyes that Morgan couldn’t exactly place. But he didn’t like how it made his hands tremble. He had to break up the tenseness that was filling the space between them. “When did you get your tattoos?”

Walter blinked at the shift in subject before he turned and held out his arm so that Morgan could better look at the ink there. Morgan hesitated, but slowly reached out and took Walter’s arm in his hands, fingers tracing the designs there. Now that Morgan could pay full attention, the swirling black designs continued shamelessly over Walter’s shoulder and across his chest and his back.

Directly above Walter’s heart was where the ink came from, engulfing Walter from a twisting vortex. It appeared to be tearing through Walter’s skin, as if a portal to another dimension had been violently ripped open. The edges of the vortex were jagged and raw like broken glass. Dark scrollings of shadow poured out from the opening, curling and twisting as they spread across Walter’s chest.

The tendrils of shadow weren’t uniform. Some were thick and powerful, like the arms of a dark creature reaching out, while others were thin and wispy, almost like smoke. They stretched out in all directions, flowing over pectoral muscles and creeping up over his shoulder and neck, as if the darkness was alive and intent on consuming everything in its path.

Morgan stepped around Walter, fingertips following the greys and blacks, and Walter let him explore silently. Beneath rested blues and purples and Morgan instantly knew what they were from, but didn’t dare say a word about the bruising the ink was hiding. The bruising gave the tattoos a supernatural, ethereal quality, creating a stark contrast against Walter’s natural skin tone, making the darkness appear even more ominous and overwhelming.

Down his back the shadows formed intricate patterns, like the curling, twisting roots of an ancient tree or the chaotic lines of fractured mirror, adding depth. The only really clear shapes were the skull on Walter’s arm and the floral on his hand.

The darkness trying to consume him had reached his other arm as well, as if it had jumped and was trying to eat him from the ruins on his wrist. As it spread, it seemed to corrupt whatever it touched, as if the light were being sucked away. Some of the coils slunk up Walter's forearm, following his veins, giving Morgan the impression that Walter was being poisoned slowly from the inside out.

Morgan knelt down, finding that the ink continued down onto Walter's left hip where the darkness was the most concentrated, the tendrils forming into sharp, jagged shapes, almost like claws or teeth, as if the darkness is trying to physically devour Walter.

Morgan's chest ached with an overwhelming, inescapable doom, as though he was watching Walter being leisurely consumed by an unstoppable force of darkness.

The markings down Walter's legs within the swirling darkness consisted of faint, ghostly images, barely visible but adding to the eerie atmosphere. Faces, hands, and eyes appeared to emerge from the shadows, as if lost souls or dark spirits were trapped within, trying to escape or drag the wearer into their abyss.

"A few months ago," Walter answered, finally breaking the silence that was going too deep between them. "Took quite a few sessions."

"What does it mean?" Morgan asked softly, afraid that if he spoke any louder Walter would somehow go up in the smoke eating him. He rose back to his feet, tracing the circus tent stripes.

"I don't need to explain that to you, Einstein, do I?" Walter gave a small chuckle, eyes flickering shut as the feather light touches from Morgan as he continued to trace the details back up Walter's abdomen. "I think it's self explanatory."

"Are you using it to hide the abuse?" Morgan glanced up at the feeling of being watched and was met with browned butter eyes, eyes Morgan hadn't realized he had missed looking at.

"Yes." Walter reached for Morgan and the shift in movement snapped Morgan back to where they were. He wasn't about to let this happen again. Not after everything Walter had said.

"I should let you rest," Morgan excused, releasing his hold on Walter's arm and turning towards the door. "I'm sure you're tired."

"Hold up, Einstein," Walter said with a teasing lint to his voice. Morgan stopped and glanced over his shoulder to be met with a dazzling smile. "The night is still young and it's still your birthday for at least another few hours. Let's go out, do something. Celebrate."

"Everything's closed," Morgan pointed out with a frown, slowly turning back.

"There has to be something still open," Walter argued, heading to the bed to grab his shirt. "We're in Scotland, surely a pub is open."

"I'm not old enough to get into a pub."

Walter pulled his shirt over his head and didn't miss the feeling of Morgan's stare, Morgan unable to look away from the muscles that flexed and moved across Walter's abdomen until they were covered by black fabric that might as well have been cling wrap.

“They won’t stop you. Nowhere checks ID and you’re nearly eighteen. They’re not going to care.” Walter received an incredulous look from Morgan. “If you’re that worried about it, I can get you in.” Walter shot Morgan a smile and Morgan’s stomach flipped painfully.

“Father will-”

“We can worry about Father in the morning.” Walter stepped closer and took Morgan’s hand. Morgan pulled his hand free and stepped back, jumping as his back hit the door, having not noticed he was so close to it. “Let’s go have some fun.”

Morgan’s brows furrowed and his mouth tipped down. “And if they do check my ID?”

“Where does Father keep the safe?” Walter asked, gently guiding Morgan out of the way of the door.

Morgan’s body went icy at the suggestion and he shook his head, trying to ignore the strength in the hands on him. “No.”

“Yes.”

“Wally,” Morgan groaned. “Father will know if we get into his safe. *If* we can get into his safe. I don’t know the combination.”

“I do, Einstein.” Walter’s smile only grew and he ruffled Morgan’s hair. “Where is it?”

“How do you know the code?” Morgan asked in astonishment as the door was opened and Walter stepped out. Morgan quickly followed after him, voice lowering so that they didn’t wake their parents. “Wally.”

“It’s in the classroom, isn’t it?” Walter made his way down the hall and Morgan raced to catch the older’s hand to pull him back. Walter glanced behind him at Morgan who shook his head with a pleading look. “Will you live for once?” Walter pulled Morgan closer, voice so low that Morgan had to lean even closer to hear him. “Get out of your head for a little while. No rules. Let them go. Let them float away down the Thames.”

Morgan’s brows knitted together and he shook his head. “I think you mean the Water of Leith,” Morgan said. “The Thames is in England and the-”

“Morgan,” Walter scolded teasingly, hand taking Morgan’s cheek and silencing the boy. “Can you not be correct for two seconds?” Walter gave a low chuckle and could feel the flush rise to Morgan’s skin beneath his palm. “Just two seconds?” His fingers brushed through Morgan’s light waves. “You want that Tristan and Isolde drawing still, or was that just to piss me off?”

“A bit of both,” Morgan admitted with a small shrug, enjoying the sharpness in Walter’s eyes. “She doesn’t know the story, Wally. How can you-”

“Not everyone grows up like us,” Walter reminded kindly, his free hand’s index finger tapping against Morgan’s temple. “Think, Einstein. Not everyone likes the same books as you.” Walter’s eyes lowered to the frown on Morgan’s face and he couldn’t stop the pad of his thumb from tracing the outline of Morgan’s cupid’s bow. Morgan inhaled sharply and Walter gave a small smile. “I’ll draw you that picture if you come out and have drinks with me.”

“Haven’t you already had enough tonight?” Morgan’s tongue brushed against Walter’s thumb, tasing the salt and smoke from his skin.

“Not nearly enough.” The words were a whisper, a breath against Morgan’s lips and Morgan’s mind reeled, trying to pull him from that moment before another mistake was made.

“It’s in the classroom behind the chalkboard,” he offered, the words getting stuck somewhere in his throat.

Morgan could feel the hesitation as Walter pulled back with a nod. He left down the hall without another word and Morgan raced after him. When he entered the classroom, he stopped and could only stare at the wall he had been shoved against earlier that evening, a mixture of pain and pleasure clawing at his chest. But Walter had come back. That had to mean something.

The chalkboard was moved out of the way and Morgan took a deep breath before standing beside Walter.

“Father’s a bit sentimental,” Walter explained, looking over the pin key on the large black safe that was always everywhere they had moved. It was the one thing consistent in all places. A key to get to wherever they needed to. “6926. He uses the same code for everything.”

“What does it mean?” Morgan asked as Walter pressed in the numbers on the keypad. His heart raced at the idea of what Hannibal would do to them when he caught them. It wasn’t a matter of if, just the time passing of when.

“The numbers stand for letters. M, W, K, and M,” Walter explained. There was a happy little beep and the red light turned green, letting Walter pull the door open. “Mischa, Will, *kleiner hase,* and *mangustėli* .”

Walter dug through the safe, pulling out a box and setting it on top of the safe. He opened it and raided it until he found what he was looking for. He held out a small card to Morgan who took it. He stared down at a picture of himself that said he was nineteen. It looked new and Morgan wondered how recently it had been updated.

“How did you know these were in here?”

“Father makes new ones all of the time. He was bound to have some new ones from the move. He’s careful.” Walter closed everything back up and turned with a satisfied smile. “Alright, you have to know what is open this late.”

“The Royal Mile Tavern is probably our best bet,” Morgan explained, a hand running through his hair. “Most places close around ten.”

“Alright. Lead the way.”

Morgan gave a small nod and left the classroom with Walter in step behind him. They wound their way to the front door and Morgan pulled on a Jacket, adjusting the hood over his head. He grabbed his keys and slipped on his shoes before quietly unlocking the door and stepping down onto the staircase. Walter followed and Morgan closed the door, locking it once more before finding his way out into the rain.

It sprinkled lightly, something more of a mist than actual rain, but it still wet their clothes nearly immediately. Morgan pulled Walter by his hand through the cobblestone streets that a few people still occupied, past shops and apartments until they reached a rather open space. It was a lovely courtyard full of benches and trees but that was still lined on either side by the shops and pubs.

Morgan came to a stop in front of brightly colored green doors of a rather tall building. Across the front, hidden behind a hanging light were the words The Royal Mile in an odd yellow color that Walter was sure was meant to be gold. There were two empty tables outside of the door with chairs picked up, no one wanting to be out in the rain. But the inside was busy and warm looking with muffled music trapped behind the closed door.

Walter opened the door, the heat and sounds of the bar bright as they were released into the night. He glanced over at Morgan who stood with a weary expression on his face and Walter smiled.

“Come on. Live for once in your life. You’re already this far.”

Morgan shot him a disapproving expression, but he stepped into the bar. The chatter was light and happy amidst the music from the band that was playing. The whole room was made of wood that the dim lights made look warm and homely against the faded wallpaper the walls were dressed in.

Walter pulled Morgan’s further in by his hand and through the crowded tables to the bar. Morgan climbed up onto a bar stool and Walter sat beside him, leaning close until their shoulders were touching.

“Let me order for you?” Walter asked, though it wasn’t a question or a suggestion. Walter was going to order for Morgan and Morgan gave a small nod. It wasn’t like he knew anything about alcohol other than wines and then he only knew which ones to cook with. He was never allowed to drink them.

Morgan blinked as a kiss was placed against his temple, something hesitant and uncertain, as if Walter knew he was pushing a boundary. His chest clenched painfully.

“Two tennent’s lagers,” Walter called out to the girl who was behind the bar.

She looked tired but immediately put on a good face. She eyed the two of them, something appreciative in her look over Walter, something a bit questioning when she reached Morgan.

“Coming up,” she said, seeming satisfied.

“What did we get?” Morgan asked, leaning his elbows on the bar.

“You know how father likes to sample wines from all the places we visit?” Walter asked and Morgan gave a small nod. “I have found that I enjoyed that sort of experience, but with beer over wine. Wine tastes like the dye they use in those easter egg dying packets.”

Morgan breathed out a laugh, his mind thinking back over the hazy memories of doing such strange crafts in his childhood. “You drank plenty of it with dinner,” he pointed out.

Walter gave a shrug. “Anyway,” he pushed on, effectively dismissing Morgan’s comment. “Italy is known for its campari, Ireland for guiness and when I am not in a whiskey kind of mood, I like beer. Scotland just happens to be known for tennent’s lager.”

“And what is a whiskey kind of mood?” Morgan questioned as a tall glass with golden liquid was placed in front of him, the glass already covered in condensation from being chilled.

“When I want to forget something.” Walter picked up his own glass and took a decent sized drink from it.

“What did you want to forget about tonight? You drank that at dinner too.”

Walter gave a frown, nose scrunched up, once more avoiding the inquiry. “Just try the beer. Stop asking so many questions.” When Morgan didn’t move, Walter nodded his head at the drink and Morgan inhaled deeply. “It’s going to be bitter, fair warning.”

Morgan picked up the glass and scented it. It held a sweet note that reminded him a little of honey. He brought it to his lips and sipped at it, drinking more at a sharp look from Walter. There was something citrusy at the beginning, maybe lemon or grapefruit, but it quickly became a more aggressive taste that made Morgan want to gag. Walter smirked with a chuckle before drinking another decent amount of his pint.

“That would be the hops,” he said, biting his bottom lip.

“This is awful,” Morgan grumbled, pushing the drink away from him. “Don’t they have anything that tastes good?”

“It’s an acquired taste.” Walter reached out and pushed the glass back to Morgan. “It gets better the more you drink. I promise.”

“I don’t know if that’s worth it.” Morgan eyed the glass wearily before picking it back up. “Father is going to kill us.” Before Walter could argue, Morgan put the glass back to his lips and drank more, chugging it down.

“Hey Einstein,” Walter warned sharply, pulling the glass from Morgan’s hand. “You’re going to make yourself sick if you do that.” Morgan was breathing hard and used his jacket sleeve to wipe at his mouth, the pint now nearly empty. “You’re not going to be happy in the morning if you keep going like that.”

“I don’t care.”

Walter looked over Morgan curiously. “You already drunk?’ he teased, leaning over the bar and towards Morgan. “What do you mean you don’t care?”

“Isn’t this what you wanted?” Morgan leaned his head into his hand, a finger circling the top of his glass. “Me to loosen up?”

“Well, yeah, but...” Walter trailed off, unsure of the words he was searching for. His hand ran through his hair, mind settling more on an insult as his only answer. “Don’t be stupid, Einstein. You want to be buzzed, not hungover.”

“Don’t think a single beer could do that,” Morgan grumbled. They fell into a small silence as Walter continued on his drink, denying a refill for Morgan who continued to circle the rim of his glass. “Were we going to talk about what happened?” Morgan asked, breaking the quiet.

Walter shifted in his seat, shoulders tensing up. “Did you want to talk about what happened?” The words were slow and cautious. Morgan shook his head and Walter let out a breath. “Then we won’t talk about it.”

“Why did you come back?”

Walter inhaled through his teeth and set down his now empty glass, turning fully in his chair to look over Morgan whose cheeks were a lovely shade of pink that made Walter smile lightly.

“I couldn’t leave your birthday on such bad terms.” Walter’s hand reached out and the back of his fingers traced over the color in Morgan’s cheeks. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel light and a bit fuzzy.”

“Good.” Walter gave a small nod. “Should we go back?”

“Can we walk around for a bit? Maybe go see St. Giles Cathedral?” Morgan asked, a lazy smile pulling at his lips. Walter was about to argue that maybe they should be in bed before Hannibal found them missing, but he couldn’t find the words at Morgan’s endearing, “Please.”

Walter ruffled Morgan’s hair and Morgan was more than happy to let those strong fingers tangle in his locks. “Sure thing, Einstein.” Walter pulled his wallet from his pocket and dropped a few bills onto the counter before getting to his feet. Morgan followed and Walter ushered them back out and into the rain. “Where do we go?”

Morgan’s fingers laced through Walter’s as he pulled him along down the road. “Come with me.” The road inclined and turned. “You’ll like it,” Morgan assured, voice a little louder than he probably meant it. “It’s from the 15th century, gothic. You like gothic architecture.”

Walter smiled and held tightly to Morgan’s hand as he was led through the drizzling rain and up the cobblestone street. “I do like Gothic architecture,” Walter agreed with a small laugh.

“And eight flying buttresses,” Morgan continued and Walter could only laugh harder.

“Wow, eight of them.” The words were sarcastic and made Morgan stop and look over at Walter with a glare.

“We don’t have to see it.”

It was nearly a threat and Walter chuckled, a hand reaching out for Morgan’s damp waves that had become more curly in the rain. He brushed back Morgan’s hair from his face and shook his head.

“I want to see it.” Morgan shot Walter a distrusting look, only causing Walter to smile more. “Show me, Morgan.” His thumb caressed Morgan’s cheek and Morgan pulled his bottom lip between his teeth before dragging Walter along once more, his movements becoming lazy and more relaxed than Walter had ever seen them.

The cathedral was lit up like daytime and shone brightly against the rainy night sky. No one was outside, but that didn’t bother Walter much. He preferred to be alone and his time with Morgan was no exception. Morgan was a special creature who needed absolute attention nearly every moment of the day and Walter was more than happy to play into that, spoiling the kid just as much as he had always been spoiled.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” Morgan muttered as they stopped in front of it besides a green statue of no one that Walter could even begin to guess the name of. But Morgan didn’t seem interested in pointing out the owner of the image. The kid looked far more content with staring up at the three large stained glass windows.

When Walter didn't answer, attention far more focused on Morgan than the cathedral, Morgan shrugged, with a: “I think it’s beautiful.”

“You’re beautiful.”

More blushed filled Morgan’s cheeks if that was possible from the flush of the alcohol that was already there. Morgan shook his head and tried to pull his hand free from Walter’s but Walter held tightly, bringing Morgan’s hand up and placing a kiss to Morgan’s knuckles.

Morgan’s mouth went dry, something behind his ribs aching. “What happened to being brothers?” he asked as a dizziness was beginning to settle in that he couldn’t exactly place as the beer, or something more natural. Walter stepped closer with a simple shake of his head. “Being sick and wrong?” Walter’s honey eyes met Morgan’s and his lips stayed tight against Morgan’s knuckles. “You’re not gay.”

“I’m not?” Walter finally asked, letting Morgan’s hand return to his side, but their fingers stayed intertwined. Morgan shook his head with furrowed brows. “Are you?”

“I kissed you,” Morgan reminded. “I think that speaks for itself.”

“I kissed you back.”

A hand rubbed across Morgan’s face and he groaned. “I thought we weren’t discussing this.” He took a step back, but Walter’s other hand reached out, snatching at Morgan’s coat and pulling the boy back towards him. “And you’re getting married and you’re going to have two little kids named Elio and Marzia and grow old as a teacher in the middle of a city slowly sinking back into the sea.”

Walter didn’t comment. He slowly wrapped his arm around Morgan’s waist and pulled him closer until their foreheads were touching, skin wet with rain, breath dancing together in the chill of the night.

“Fold your arms round me close,” Walter whispered, calling Morgan’s eyes to his own. He blamed Morgan for the book being brought to his mind. If he hadn’t made those stupid little comments at dinner, then Walter wouldn’t have been mentally rereading the entirety of the book in his head all night. “And strain me so that our hearts may break and our souls go free at last.”

Morgan licked his lips, the rest of the quote leaving him before he could stop it. “Take me to that happy place of which you told me long ago. The fields whence none return, but where great singers sing their songs forever.” Morgan’s fingers trailed up Walter’s chest before resting around Walter’s neck naturally. “Are we cursed like them? Will we be buried together, side by side?”

Walter breathed out a laugh. “In coffins of chalcedony and beryl,” he agreed, his head nodding against Morgan’s. “To the right and the left of a chantry.”

“And you’ll climb over the chantry with a green leafy briar, strong in branches and in the scent of its flowers to root by my tomb?”

“And come back stronger each time they cut me down.”

Morgan wasn’t certain what snapped him from his haze, but he jumped back and out of Walter’s grip when Walter leaned down. Morgan shot a smile to his face, breathing hard, his hands rubbing against his thighs as he nervously stepped further back.

“You didn’t even comment on the flying buttresses,” Morgan teased, voice wavering. Walter glanced between him and the church for a moment before shaking his head with a small smile. “There’s eight of them.”

Walter gave a laugh and turned to face the cathedral completely, motioning to it grandly with a wave of his hand. “That’s quite the engineering feat,” he said, though he knew Morgan already knew all of the details. “They said it couldn’t be done. Said it would be impossible like painting the Sistine Chapel.” His voice was teasing. “No one had ever made more than seven.”

This still wasn’t a big enough distance for Morgan. They had to leave. They had to get out of here before they ended up doing something stupid.

“Do you want another drink?” Morgan asked, causing Walter to turn around with a questioning expression, his hand falling back to his side. “I was not impressed with the beer.” He hoped the clarification was enough of a distraction. “And there’s this place that I wanted to try. My friends say it’s good.”

“Friends?” Walter teased, trying to close the distance between them again. “Don’t make me jealous, Morgan.”

“You’ve been doing that to me all night!” Morgan looked shocked as the words came from him and Walter gave a small smirk at the admittance. Morgan shook his head and ran a hand through his hair, doing his best to cover his mistake with a weak voice. “They’re supposed to have really good whiskey.”

“I’ll forget things.”

Morgan closed his eyes for a moment with a deep breath, when he opened them again, he grabbed a fistful of Walter’s shirt and pulled him closer. He stood on his toes, placing a quick kiss to Walter’s rain-covered lips. “I think,” he whispered, lips still pressed to Walter’s, “you’d remember me if you wanted to.” Morgan released Walter’s shirt and turned, starting back up the street with his hands clasping behind his back as his heart raced. He didn’t want to wait for Walter, and wasn't sure if he could face the reaction. “It’s still my birthday, hurry up!”

Walter gave a huff of laughter and raced after Morgan.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me beta this chapter! Couldn't do this without you.

# Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

> Walter was breathing hard and Morgan could see blood dripping from the corner of Walter's mouth. A shiver ran through Morgan as Walter's tongue snaked out to lick at the crimson and Morgan shook his head to focus back at the task at hand.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Walter glanced around at the Mitre bar. The outside wasn't as elaborate as the last place; it was simple stone work, but inside was cozy and warm. It smelled like booze and smoke, something comforting to Walter.

Morgan had taken a seat at an empty table by the window and shot Walter a smile, a hand taking the wet fabric of Walter's shirt and pulling at it until Walter leaned over, a hand on the edge of the table.

"Order something for me?" Morgan asked lightly with a playful smile on his lips. "Something you actually enjoy." A kiss was pressed into Walter's cheek and Morgan let him go. Walter stared at the kid for a moment, who was happily looking outside the window, before heading off to the bar.

He returned with two glasses and set one in front of Morgan before taking the seat next to him. "Go gentle on this, Einstein," he warned, though it would be a lie to say he wouldn't be impressed to see Morgan down the whiskey like he had the beer. "You'll be fucked up in the morning." Walter took a decent sized gulp and set the glass down, gritting his teeth against the initial bite.

Morgan lifted the glass, inspecting the amber liquid that danced among the rocks. "What is it?"

"A spiced whiskey."

Morgan's nose scrunched up curiously before he took a sip, something caramel on his tongue before it gave way to something like cinnamon with a mix of black pepper. Morgan coughed and set the glass down, the burn bright. He glared at Walter when Walter laughed.

"This is what I like." Walter took another drink.

"Would it taste better from your tongue?"

Walter choked on his mouthful, the burn in his nose immediate. He coughed, setting the glass down, a hand going to his mouth. His glass had covered his hand and the table in whiskey. His eyes looked over Morgan whose cheeks were rosy pink; from alcohol or embarrassment, Walter wasn't quite sure.

"What?" Walter finally got out.

“Nothing.” Morgan shook his head innocently, taking another drink as his gaze returned out the window. Knowing what to expect, the drink went down smoother. He inhaled sharply through his teeth and tried to push away the warmth that the spice brought with it that made his rain chilled skin hot. “Go refill your glass,” he instructed when he noticed Walter was trying to clean up what he had spilt with napkins. “I’ll still be here when you get back.”

Walter nodded, picked up the trash and his cup, and headed back to the bar to get a new drink. He sighed as he leaned up against the bar, waiting to catch one of the busy tenders, the place much fuller than he had thought with how empty it was outside.

He stared at Morgan who was sitting quietly, still wet from the rain, and his chest clenched tightly. What were they doing? What was wrong with him? He should have gotten on that plane and gone back to Italy. He should have left when he had the chance. Why did he have to come back for the kid? He always caved and crumbled for the kid.

Someone took Walter’s seat back at the table and Walter couldn’t help but frown, though he didn’t move. He ordered absently when asked what he wanted, and watched. It could have been one of Morgan’s friends, if he actually had any friends.

Walter knew that Morgan valued his privacy more than connections and Morgan didn’t have trouble with connections like Will did. Morgan was just bored easily if his mind wasn’t engaged. Morgan would find a textbook on how to make mud more interesting than he would a person.

But the smile on Morgan’s lips told Walter that this person was more interesting than an unneeded “how to" textbook and it irked Walter how it made his gut twist. Morgan was simply talking to another person. Morgan was allowed to speak to someone if he wanted to. He was his own person. He was an adult. But Walter didn’t want Morgan smiling like that at anyone else. No one deserved to see the sunshine that was his smile

Walter’s drink was set on the bar and he took it, downing it quickly, not caring about how much he had already had that night. His jaw clenched as he looked back at the table, ready to try to weather another onslaught of smiles but was surprised when he saw dislike and harsh words on Morgan’s lips, though Walter couldn’t hear them.

Walter tossed some money onto the bar before straightening himself up. If things were going the direction he thought they would, he needed to settle his debt now before they were kicked out of the bar. The man who sat in his chair needed to vacate it now and not so much as look at Morgan again if he was making Morgan this upset.

“Stop that,” Morgan ordered in a hard, but hushed tone. As Walter got closer he could see Morgan shoving the other man’s hands away. “Fuck off!”

Walter took the older man’s shoulder in a firm grip and he looked up at Walter with dazed eyes, obviously drunk. “I don’t think he can be any clearer than fuck off, do you?” Walter hissed in a low voice. “Leave him alone or I will make sure you do.”

“Get off of me,” the man said in a slurred voice, accent more English than Scottish.

“Wally,” Morgan warned, getting to his feet. “It’s ok. Let’s just go.”

“He’s-”

“Wally, let’s go home.”

Morgan took Walter’s hand, gently tugging on it. Walter closed his eyes with a calming exhale and released his hold on the man’s shoulder, before turning away and letting Morgan try to lead him towards the door.  He did his best to ignore the man getting from the chair haphazardly.

Something hit the back of Walter’s head and he stopped, a hand reaching up and wiping at where he had felt the spit hit him. He opened his mouth, ready to yell, but stopped when he caught Morgan’s cautious look telling him that he needed to leave it alone.

“Does your bitch always call the shots?” the man taunted behind Walter. “Run home to your slut.”

Before Walter could rationalize the situation, he turned, fist easily finding the face of the man. A silence filled the bar as soon as the clanking of chairs had quieted, the man tangled up in them. Walter rubbed at his knuckles, soothing the pain there, noting that it had been a while since he had needed to hit anyone.

“Next time have the courage to say that to my face,” Walter spat, pointing to the man.

Walter’s eyes flickered over to where two other men stood from their table. One had broad shoulders and a mustache that made Walter think ‘70’s cop pornos would be jealous of it. The other was smaller, but had muscle like Walter. Maybe a swimmer if Walter had to guess.

“Morgan, let’s go. Come on.” Walter turned around and took Morgan’s arm in his grip, pulling Morgan out and into the rain, sure that the employees would be more than happy to see them leaving. They walked in silence for a while, Walter checking over his shoulder every now and then, waiting for what he knew was coming. “They’re following us.”

“They’re drunk and pissed,” Morgan said. “You hurt his pride. They’re going to want to make you hurt.”

“I’d like to see them try.”

Morgan glanced behind them to find the three men in step with them, just far enough back that they were out of reach. If they ran for it, they could probably reach the flat without issue, but Morgan knew Walter better than that. Knew that Walter would rather face the wrath of a drunken brawl than Hannibal.

“They’re not going to stop until they get a hit in.” Morgan sighed and came to a stop in the middle of the street, bringing Walter to a halt. “We might as well take care of this.” Morgan looked up at Walter to make sure they were on the same page and found a look that he knew far too well. It was the same look that Walter had worn when that kid stole his soccer ball back in Germany. He was going to try to talk his way out of everything. “Don’t.” Morgan shook his head. “You’re going to end up with a broken nose again.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Einstein,” Walter assured. Morgan was stunned as a hand ruffled his hair, seeming to be its new favorite habit. “Head back home. I’ll be there in a bit.”

Morgan shook his head, pulling Walter’s hand from him. “You’re not doing this alone.” Morgan’s voice was strong and Walter sighed with an accepting nod a lot easier than Morgan thought he would.

They waited as the three men slowly circled them. Walter made sure to note where each one was, eyes dropping down to Morgan who stood beside him as well. Porno to the right, swimmer to the left and black eye in front of them.

The rain was beginning to fall heavily now, no longer a light mist and Walter pushed back his soaked hair from his face, waiting for someone to make the first move. His body ached for it, his blood rushing in his veins like it did when he would have to fight Hannibal as a child.

A click sent Walter's attention to the swimmer who had flicked open a knife. Instinctively, Walter snatched up Morgan and placed himself protectively between the two when the swimmer tried to take a slash at Morgan.

Walter caught the man's arm and wrist, forcing his arm to bend and the knife towards the swimmer's neck. There was a groan as Walter bent his wrist and the knife clattered to the cobble stones. His elbow connected with the man's nose, feeling the snap more than hearing it.

With weight added against the swimmer whose balance was shot, Walter easily sent the man to the ground, nursing his broken nose. It wouldn't keep him down long, but it would buy Walter time to deal with the rest.

There was a grunt beside him and Walter caught sight of Morgan collapsing to his knees, holding his middle and gasping, the air knocked from him with a punch to the ribs. Walter took a step towards Morgan, only to receive a fist directly to the face from a punch he had stupidly missed.

Morgan's lungs burned as he tried to pull air back into them, gasping. Memories of Walter having the air knocked out of him snapped to the forefront of his mind and he grasped tightly to Hannibal's orders for Walter to focus on his breathing. He forced himself to inhale deeply and grabbed at the hand on his shoulder, twisting the mustached man's thumb back until the grip broke.

He collapsed onto his hands and knees once he was free, gasping as he caught his breath. A hand grabbed a chunk of his hair and tugged up on it. Morgan's hands snatched for the dropped knife and his fingers caught it before he was pulled back to his knees. One of his hands went to the fist in his hair to alleviate the pressure off of it, and the other stabbed the knife into the man's upper thigh.

Morgan's hair was released and he dropped back to his hands, the burn on his scalp making his eyes water. He wiped at his eyes and shakily pushed himself to his feet to look over the man who was curled up on the ground, clutching his leg and groaning

His eyes wandered the placement of the blade and he stepped closer to the man to make sure he could be heard. "Do not take that out," he instructed, calling wide and disbelieving eyes to him. "You'll bleed out if you do and your friends won't be able to do anything to help you."

Morgan rubbed at the back of his head, his other hand pulling at the hem of his shirt, his fingers gingerly pressing into the punch he had received. There was nothing broken but he was certain his ribs were probably bruised and it was going to be a bitch to deal with in the morning if he couldn't get his hands on some painkillers.

There was a groan and Morgan watched as Walter forced the man who had been hitting on Morgan to the ground, the man on his knees with an arm twisted up behind his back. Walter was breathing hard and Morgan could see blood dripping from the corner of Walter's mouth. A shiver ran through Morgan as Walter's tongue snaked out to lick at the crimson and Morgan shook his head to focus back at the task at hand.

There was a cry as Walter forced the man's arm up in a tight grip and the sickening snap of bones breaking rang out into the night. Walter released the man, who crumbled to the ground beside the other, moaning and clutching at his snapped arm.

Something swept at the back of Morgan's ankles and before he could catch himself, he fell, his head erupting in pain as it cracked against the cobblestones. He whined and curled in on himself, his ribs screaming at him as he reached up to cradle his head.

Something heavy pressed to his chest and a sharp force hit Morgan full in the face. Morgan coughed as sticky warm blood ran down his throat, making his stomach turn. The weight was ripped away and Morgan rolled over, spitting the blood from his mouth.

Walter dragged the swimmer from Morgan and pulled him tightly against his body, an arm wrapped around the man's neck. He swiftly hooked his dominant hand under his arm to lock the sleeper hold, the movements fluid and natural, and he hated it. Hated how easily all of the training came back to him.

The man tried to reach back for Walter and Walter pressed his hip into the small of the man's back, keeping himself out of reach of the prying hands.

It only took a few more seconds before the man went limp in his grip and Walter let the body tumble to the ground, unconscious. Walter glanced around at the three men, trying to catch his breath as his heart ran madly. He was out of practice. He would have to start training harder and at the burn in his lungs, he knew he needed to kick the smoking. It would make it impossible for him to do anything if he kept it up.

Walter made his way over to where Morgan was still curled up on the ground. He reached down and took Morgan's arm, pulling Morgan to his feet. His hands and eyes roamed Morgan, taking in the damage and the cause of all the blood, giving a sigh of relief when the calculations were done.

"Your nose is going to be bruised, but it doesn't look broken," he said softly, hands holding Morgan's cheeks, Morgan's eyes cloudy from the alcohol and epinephrine. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah," Morgan muttered with a small nod.

Adrenaline was rushing Walter's system, feeling like the first time he had crack in his blood. His pain was fading away from the coldness of the rain and Morgan's eyes, and Walter couldn't stop himself.

He leaned down and kissed Morgan, pulling the boy closer to him. Morgan clutched tightly to him. There was nothing kind or gentle about the kiss. It was hot and heavy as their blood, thinned by the rain, smeared over their mouths and down their chins, salty on their lips and tongues.

Walter pulled back, inhaling deeply, keeping Morgan's body close to his.

"Home?" he asked. Morgan's nod was hurried and he pulled Walter with him through the bodies that were all still moaning in the middle of the street.

Morgan kept the pace strong, fast, nearly a jog through the now heavily falling rain and they reached the stairs leading up to the apartment door. Morgan was quick to shove Walter against the wall, a little taller on the higher step. He kissed Walter, hands tangling into Walter's hair. The kisses

were smoldering and messy, but Walter didn't care. He let Morgan hover over him, the new angle enticing as Walter had always been the tallest person in his relationships.

He carefully pushed Morgan up the rest of the stairs, not daring to break the kiss until he had Morgan shoved up against their front door. His fingers dipped into Morgan's pockets until he found the keys and Morgan helped locate the right one. Walter unlocked the door and caught Morgan as he stumbled backwards as the door was pushed open.

Morgan jumped up, being caught easily and he wrapped his legs around Walter's middle, the door loud as it shut behind them.

"We need to get cleaned up," Walter said between hungry kisses that were being pressed mercilessly to his lips. Morgan shook his head as he was set on the counter. He pulled at the back of Walter's soaked shirt, trying to drag it off. "Hold on, Einstein," Walter took Morgan's hands in his own and forced the two of them to part. "I'm going to kiss you all night, but let me take care of you first."

Morgan shivered and closed his eyes. "Promise?" he asked weakly.

Walter felt a smile tug at his swollen lips. He leaned forward and licked a hot stripe across Morgan's lips. He snorted at how quickly Morgan reached for him again.

"Promise," he whispered. "Where's the first aid kit?"

"Bathroom sink."

Walter stepped out of Morgan's grasp and disappeared down the hall. He could feel his body becoming stiffer, pain settling in. He grabbed for the first aid kit, having found it where Morgan said, and paused to look down at the sight of his bloodied and bruised knuckles.

When he returned to the kitchen, Morgan was kicking off his wet shoes and pulling off his socks while hopping over to the washer. It was opened and the socks tossed inside. Walter watched with a small smile. Morgan's dripping coat and shirt came next, the fabric sticking to his skin and making him shiver as he was freed from it. Then his shorts were added.

Walter placed the first aid kit onto the island and followed Morgan's lead in tugging his shirt over his head and adding it to the washer. Down to his boxer briefs and the dryer was started, a light hum settling into the room.

Walter turned on one of the lamps in the living room and it casted a much needed warm glow. He wandered back to the counter and gently pushed Morgan out of the way of the first aid kit to dig through it himself.

"Go put on some warm clothes," Walter instructed. "You're going to make yourself sick." His eyes flickered up at the obedience and he watched as Morgan disappeared down the hall. Walter set out some alcohol wipes to start and his eyes snapped back up to the hall that Morgan was returning from, seeming to take his sweet time with pulling on a tank top. Morgan's eyes met Walter's and Walter instantly looked back at his work, chest fluttering. "Come here, Morgan. Let me look over you."

Morgan stepped over to Walter and Walter opened the alcohol wipe he had pulled out. He took Morgan's chin in his hand and carefully began cleaning the boy's nose. There was a gash in the

bridge that nearly matched Hannibal's. He then moved to another one across Morgan's cheek from what could have possibly been a ring. Morgan winced with a gasp, face scrunching up at the burn from the cleaners.

"Shh," Walter hushed softly, leaning over and placing a kiss on Morgan's lips. "It's alright. They're nothing deep. Your pretty face is fine."

"You think I'm pretty?" Morgan breathed into the air between them. Walter licked at his lips, but didn't say anything. He simply went back to wiping down Morgan's face. "Your eye." Morgan's hand reached out and his fingers carefully touched the bruising that was forming under Walter's eye.

"I'm alright," Walter assured as he tipped Morgan's head back gently and then from side to side and gave a nod of satisfaction. "What else happened to you?"

The wipe was tossed aside and Morgan pulled the hem of his shirt up to reveal his ribs. Walter knelt down, hands taking Morgan's hips to help him better see in the dimness. Walter's fingers pressed into the red and purple that was splashed across Morgan's torso and Morgan shifted in discomfort.

"It looks like it's just some bruising. We'll get you some acetaminophen. That should be safe for you to take." Walter leaned forward and placed an open mouthed kiss to Morgan's bare stomach, feeling Morgan shiver at the touch.

"I hit my head too," Morgan muttered and Walter paused in his kisses. He slowly rose back to his feet, tongue trailing up Morgan's stomach until he reached the fabric of Morgan's shirt. Morgan shifted on his feet. He met Morgan's gaze and his fingers carefully ran through Morgan's brunette waves. Morgan bit his lip with a sharp inhale, eyes squeezing shut as Walter's fingers touched a spot on the back of his head.

Concern filled Walter and he carefully explored the bump under Morgan's hair. "You don't feel nauseous, do you?" Morgan shook his head. "And you're not dizzy or seeing double, are you?"

"No," Morgan whispered, sending relief through Walter.

"It's just a goose egg. We'll ice it. You'll be fine."

Walter pulled away from Morgan and Morgan felt cold at the lack of touch. Walter dug through the kit until he found a small pack of medicine and an ice pack. He passed the medicine to Morgan who opened it and dry swallowed the pills as Walter activated the ice pack before handing it to Morgan too. Morgan placed the pack to his head and watched as Walter opened a new alcohol wipe and began cleaning his knuckles.

"I forgot how badly this hurts," Walter said with a huff of laughter.

"You've only been playing soccer, haven't you?" Morgan asked, leaning against the island as he watched Walter work. Walter gave a nod and Morgan sighed. "You can't just stop practicing hand to hand. You'll get rusty. What if something worse than a drunk brawl happens to you?"

Walter's eyes flickered up, a golden toffee color in them and his lips cracked into a side grin. "Are you worried about me?" There was a hint of a tease to his tone. He tossed the wipe aside and was about to put things away when Morgan stopped his hands with a careful touch. Morgan set the icepack on the counter and pulled another wipe from the kit, ripping it open.

“I’ll always worry about you, Wally,” Morgan replied, reaching out and gently sweeping the cold cloth over Walter’s lips and chin, cleaning the faint blood that was still there. He dug a little deeper into the corner of Walter’s lip to make sure the split was fully cleaned. Walter didn’t wince or pull away, just stared over Morgan’s face. “And I won’t always be there to help. I won’t always be there to break some snotty kid’s arm or have a gun to take down German gangsters or a knife to stab some jerk in the leg. You have to take care of yourself.”

“Don’t get sentimental on me, Einstein.” Walter’s smile was warning.

Morgan gave a snort of laughter and dropped the used wipe on the counter, reaching out for Walter’s bare hips, pulling him closer. “Wally, you promised you’d kiss me.”

Walter’s brows rose and he tipped his head to the side. “Did I?” He rested his forehead against Morgan’s. Morgan nodded enthusiastically and Walter laughed, something deep in his chest. “Demanding, aren’t you?”

“You said all night.” Morgan reminded, eyes so blue under dark lashes.

“Where’s your room?” Walter asked softly, stepping closer to Morgan, hands resting against the kid’s back. The admittance that came next felt freeing in a way, Walter’s chest not quite so tight. “I miss sleeping beside you.” Morgan made a small noise in the back of his throat that Walter couldn’t exactly place and Walter made sure to keep a hold on Morgan when his knees shook.

“Across from yours.”

Walter slipped his hand into Morgan’s and he led the way towards the bedroom. He opened the door and flicked on the light. He stared at the room that was a decent size for how small the apartment looked from the outside.

A perfectly folded bed, not a wrinkle in the deep purple duvet. There were two large bookshelves stuffed to the point of bursting with books, well read, spines discolored from use. On the wall opposite were pinned sketches. Nothing that Morgan drew. Morgan didn’t draw unless he had to for one of Hannibal’s assignments.

But Walter recognized them. They had all been things that he had drawn. Mostly stupid little doodles that had been passed to the kid in the middle of classes just to distract him. Others were gifts for Morgan’s birthday or Christmas or just because Walter felt like giving him a drawing because it made those winter eyes light up like summer.

Walter blinked as he took it all in. “You kept them all.” His words were barely a whisper.

“Of course I kept them all,” Morgan stated like it was the simplest thing in the world. He pushed Walter far enough into the room so that he could close the door. “Did you want to borrow some clothes? I don’t know if anything I own will fit you. Maybe my workout clothes.”

Morgan wandered over to his dresser and pulled some clothes free, tossing some gym shorts and a tank top onto the bed before he sat down on the edge. Walter pulled the clothes closer to him and stripped the wet boxers from his hips without shame. It was nothing new between the two of them, but Walter could feel the shift in the air.

He glanced over to Morgan, whose eyes were watching him. Walter’s mouth went dry in the blue and he felt like he was intruding on something. Morgan’s eyes met Walter’s and a heat filled

Walter's cheeks. He let the clothes leave his mind and he moved to the bed, climbing onto it and pushing Morgan back into it. Morgan's hands were quick to trail up Walter's chest and settle around his neck, untroubled by their closeness.

Walter captured Morgan's lips in a kiss, ignoring the slight pain from the split in his lip. Morgan sighed into the kiss, his hands quickly going to explore the muscles in Walter's back, going lower and lower until his fingers stopped where the waistline of Walter's boxers would have been.

Walter could feel the hesitation in the touch, but he didn't push it. His chest constricted tightly when Morgan's hands moved from his lower back and to his thighs, the feeling of being completely bare suddenly nerve racking like it had been the first time.

Morgan's teeth were sharp as they bit into Walter's bottom lip and Walter shivered at the action. Walter shifted his weight on his knees and used his freed hands to slip under Morgan's shirt. Morgan trembled as Walter's fingers continued to explore him.

They had touched each other before, just not like this. They had explored and bandaged and repaired each other. Held each other every night, protected each other. But they had never loved each other before.

"I want these clothes off you, Einstein," Walter grumbled against Morgan's lips. Morgan didn't hesitate. His hands went to the hem of his shirt, but Walter quickly snatched them up. He chuckled and shook his head, whispering, "Let me."

Morgan's eyes opened, glassy, lips a bright red from being kissed so thoroughly. Walter couldn't stop the smile from forming and he pulled away from Morgan, receiving a sound of disapproval.

"Don't you dare move," Walter instructed, pressing a chaste kiss to the tip of Morgan's nose. "Let me take care of you."

"Ok," Morgan said thickly.

"Good boy."

With hands now free, Walter pulled on the hem of Morgan's shirt, leaning down to place slow kisses over Morgan's exposed skin. Morgan's muscles tensed, and Walter glanced up to see Morgan's eyes shut tight and his hands fisted in the bedsheets.

"I can stop," Walter said, causing Morgan's eyes to snap open with a deep breath. Morgan shook his head and Walter licked his lips. "You don't have to be so stiff. Relax." Morgan nodded, his head falling back into the bed and Walter chuckled. He leaned down, nipping at Morgan's hip and causing Morgan to jump. "Put your hands in my hair."

"What?" Morgan's brows furrowed.

"Put your hands in my hair." Walter waited patiently while Morgan's fingers unlocked from their death grip in the duvet. They slowly reached for Walter, finger's finding their way into Walter's hair. "Good boy."

"I'm not a dog," Morgan snapped and Walter smirked. Morgan swallowed and rolled his eyes, trying his best to find the words that came spilling from him like a fountain. "This is new, Wally. I

don’t know what I’m supposed to be feeling, but I like it. And-And I don’t know why you want this from me. I know you’ve only ever been with girls before. And I just- I just-”

“Hush,” Walter quieted. He pushed himself back up Morgan’s body so he could meet Morgan’s cloudy eyes. “Get out of your head, Einstein.” He placed a kiss on Morgan's forehead.

Morgan groaned and closed his eyes, fingers tightening in their grip in Walter’s hair. “Don’t call me that. Not when we’re about to...” Morgan trailed off and one of his hands quickly covered his blushing face. Walter chuckled and pulled at Morgan’s hand, gently coaxing it back to his hair.

“About to what, Einstein?”

"You know..." he whispered, only making Walter smile more.

"I want to hear you say it," Walter pushed. Morgan shook his head. "What am I going to do to you?"

"Fuck me," Morgan got out, quickly looking away from Walter, blush reaching his hairline and spreading down his neck and chest.

"Such a good boy, Morgan." He placed a kiss to the tip of Morgan’s nose, making Morgan smile with a small laugh. “Am I ok to keep going?” Morgan bit his bottom lip and nodded. “You can stop me whenever you want, alright?” Morgan nodded again. Walter’s smile softened and he nuzzled his nose against Morgan’s. “You have no idea how often I dreamt of this.” He kissed Morgan again, making sure Morgan didn’t have a chance to analyze the words.

Morgan’s tense muscles loosened as he was kissed, hands naturally digging into Walter’s hair as his heart pounded in his chest. Walter once more began working on Morgan’s shirt, guiding Morgan to sit up enough to pull it off. It was tossed to be forgotten on the floor and Walter’s palm pressed into Morgan’s chest, guiding him back into the bed.

“Lift your hips for me,” Walter whispered, trailing kisses down Morgan’s jaw. There was a whimper and Morgan was kissed into silence. Walter slid down Morgan’s body, lips finding Morgan’s collarbone as he went. His lips followed the path of his hand down Morgan's chest, nipping at Morgan’s flesh, pulling quiet sounds from Morgan’s mouth. When Walter bit at Morgan’s hip, the boy moaned and lifted his hips as he had been instructed to.

Walter glanced up to find Morgan’s eyes closed once more and he licked at the skin just above the band of Morgan’s sleep pants. Morgan inhaled with a hiss through his teeth, no pain behind it.

Walter’s finger’s dipped with excruciating slowness under the waistline of Morgan’s pants. Morgan gave a frustrated huff that nearly made Walter laugh.

“You’re so impatient,” Walter scolded teasingly, pulling lightly at the fabric. “We’ve waited this long and we have time.”

“Want you,” Morgan muttered, his hands once more covering his blushing face. “Don’t make me wait.”

Walter could feel the muscles in Morgan’s legs beginning to strain at the position he was forcing Morgan to hold himself in and Walter scoffed, wanting to stretch this out as much as he could just to see how long it took for Morgan to snap.

Morgan's gut twisted as fabric was slowly pulled from his hips and hot breath was teasing at his skin before Walter kissed into the newly exposed flesh. Morgan's thighs gave a painful twinge and he gasped at the assaults, lips touching him places that no one had ever touched him before.

"W-Walter," Morgan gasped out, licking his lips, finding it hard to breathe when butterscotch bright eyes met his. "Please."

"Please what, Morgan?" Walter teased, tongue trailing up the inside of Morgan's trembling thigh as he exposed the skin to the air.

Morgan moaned as Walter's eyes stayed on his, and he had to remind himself not to move his hands that were begging to dig through Walter's dark hair.

"I can't hold this position."

"I never told you to hold it." Walter teased. "But maybe you need more training too. Has father been going easy on you?" Walter stopped pulling at the fabric of Morgan's pants and let them stay around the boy's thighs as he leaned up to press kisses into the fluttering muscles in Morgan's stomach. "Your core could use tightening."

Walter bit at Morgan's pale skin and Morgan snapped. A broken sound left his throat and his hands once more reached for Walter, grabbing handfuls of Walter's hair and pulling him up. Walter was kissed with a searing heat and he didn't miss the opportunity for his hands to touch every inch of Morgan they could.

Muscles that were well defined, but hidden beneath stupid dress shirts. Powerful thighs that Walter removed the fabric from and tossed aside unceremoniously. Hands and arms that could command Walter's body if they wished, though they stayed pleasantly submissive.

There was no hesitation with Walter's movements. His hand reached down and Morgan groaned through bitten lips, head falling back into the bed as Walter took his length and stroked him.

"A little quieter, Morgan," Walter instructed gently, cheek nuzzling against Morgan's. Morgan's mind raced, the drag of stubble mind numbing as an ache began to set into his fingers that were still gripping at Walter tightly. "We don't want to wake Dad or Father."

Morgan shuttered at the words, something so dirty about being found out. Something so terrifying in the idea of their parents knowing about them, but it seemed to only heighten the feeling that was rushing through him like lightning. Morgan's toes curled and he did his best to stifle a moan at the slow pumping, but the confident movements of Walter's hand made it nearly impossible.

Walter gave a small chuckle at the wrecked sound from Morgan and he kissed Morgan's neck, lips caressing the bruising that he had left there earlier that evening. "Quiet, Morgan," Walter repeated, feeling the way that Morgan's pulse picked up under his kiss as his thumb slid over the slit in the head of Morgan's cock. He placed a kiss to Morgan's cheek as the boy did his best to stay quiet.

"God, you're so beautiful," Walter whispered, placing another kiss to Morgan's cheek. "The way you come undone in my grip." Walter slowed his motions and Morgan gave a whimper, knuckles white, adam's apple bobbing as Morgan swallowed.

Morgan gave another whimper and slowly opened his eyes. The blue was dark with struggle and Walter stopped before he kissed the boy, something similar, but not quite as strong as guilt twisted

his gut. It struck Walter how young Morgan really was. He was just a kid. He could take care of himself and hold his own in a fight, he could read books with words that Walter would never be able to understand even after using a dictionary, but Morgan... was a kid.

Walter released his hold on Morgan completely and Morgan gasped in air as if he hadn't been able to breathe before. Walter grabbed Morgan's chin and kissed Morgan softly.

"Am I still ok to keep going?"

"Yes," Morgan said quickly, voice raspy as if he were just learning to use his vocal chords. "I want everything you have to give me. I want you."

Morgan's mind was racing, unable to focus on one single thought for more than a moment, alcohol dulling and fogging his head in a pleasant sort of way. He leaned up to kiss Walter deeply, stealing away Walter's breath. "Do I need to show you?" Morgan asked between the kisses. "Do I need to show you how much I want you?"

"Show me?" Walter asked in confusion when Morgan pulled back.

Morgan didn't answer. His movements were swift and stronger than Walter could remember them ever being. Walter found himself shoved into the bed, Morgan over the top of him and he stared up at sparkling blue eyes and a smug smile. He bit his lip, feeling as if he was unable to breathe at the deity above him.

"My turn," Morgan whispered, nipping at Walter's jaw. Walter could only stare as the boy shifted down the bed until he kissed Walter's stomach. His eyes met Walter's and kept his gaze as he licked at the head of Walter's erection.

Walter shuttered, head tipping back with a loud, "Fuck." His hands went to his face and he rubbed at his eyes as the wet heat of Morgan's mouth surrounded him until he could see patterns dancing beneath his palms. He lowered his hands back to the bed and snatched up fistfulls of the fabric that was warm from where Morgan had been laying earlier. Morgan's tongue licked from the top, lazily down to the bottom of Walter, kissing at the vein there. "Shit."

"Shhh," Morgan warned tauntingly, his breath sending cold chills down Walter's spine. "You're louder than me."

"God," Walter grumbled, twitching as Morgan's lips skimmed over him. "Your mouth." Morgan simply hummed and Walter had to fight to not reach out and snatch up fistfuls of Morgan's hair as Mogan lowered himself until Walter could feel himself hit the back of Morgan's throat. "M-Morgan," he gasped out, hips bucking without his permission. Morgan pulled back slightly, his hand taking the place of his mouth while he tried to catch his breath. His tongue swiftly went back to work, teasing at Walter maddeningly. Walter's hands reached out and tangled in Morgan's hair. "Morgan, s-stop."

Morgan shook his head and lowered himself back down, causing Walter to give a choked sound, knees bending and fingers tugging at Morgan's hair. Morgan's eyes met Walter's and Walter shivered, gut tight with heat.

"Damn it," Walter hissed, pulling at Morgan's hair until it was painful. "Kid, knock it off." Morgan let himself be pulled up by Walter's hands and Walter leaned forward, capturing Morgan's swollen and abused lips with his own, tongue pushing into Morgan's mouth. Morgan moaned at the

intrusion and his eyes slid shut. “I don’t want to cum yet,” Walter explained in a scolding tone. Morgan was breathing hard when Walter released him. “You’re sure you’ve never done this before?”

“Was it good?” Morgan asked curiously, hands resting on Walter’s thighs, nails running the length of the muscle there and Walter groaned frustratedly, leaning back into the bed once more. His skin lit up at the trails Morgan left behind, burning in ways he had never felt before.

“The best I’ve had, kid.”

Morgan frowned and moved abruptly so that he could kiss Walter again. “I’m not a kid,” he hissed as his teeth latched onto Walter’s bottom lip and he tugged at it, pulling a moan from Walter. “Don’t call me that.” He released his hold on Walter’s lip and Walter’s hands took his shoulders, shoving Morgan harshly and down into the mattress, climbing over the top of the boy.

“You’re such a brat,” Walter scolded, though there was a playful smile on his lips. He reached up, his thumb pulling at Morgan’s bottom lip. “Open your mouth for me.” Morgan rolled his eyes but obeyed, mouth opening slowly, tongue licking at Walter’s thumb. “God, you’re such a brat.” Walter leaned down and kissed at Morgan’s tongue. Morgan moaned and his body relaxed enough for Walter to slip two fingers into Morgan’s languidly open mouth. “Put that pretty mouth of yours to work.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me beta this chapter! Couldn't do this without you.

# Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

> “Don’t say things like that,” Walter whispered with a huff of laughter. “It makes me weak.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morgan’s eyes slid shut as he closed his mouth around Walter’s fingers, sucking on them, tongue tasting himself from what Walter had done to him earlier. A sigh escaped him at the idea and he felt teeth nip at his collar bone.

“When we do this again,” Walter said against Morgan’s skin. Morgan shivered violently at the picture of this happening again. Would it happen again? Morgan didn’t want to think about the what ifs. “I’ll let you have your way with me. But tonight, I want to make you feel good.” Morgan whimpered at a rather harsh bite on his shoulder that was quickly soothed with Walter’s tongue. Walter blew against the reddening skin and Morgan shivered. “Still doing alright?”

Morgan nodded, spit dripping down his chin when Walter pulled his fingers free. His chest was filled with a smothering blooming heat that he couldn’t name or place at the smirk Walter gave him.

“Good. I need to take care of what’s mine.”

He was Walter’s? Fully and completely Walter’s? That’s what Walter had implied right? Morgan belonged to him? It couldn’t mean anything else, could it? No, Morgan decided. He belonged to Walter, his mind, soul, and body and Morgan didn’t want it any other way.

And maybe he was being rash and stupid and careless, especially after everything that Walter had done to him just the hours before. All the words that Walter had said that cut Morgan so deeply he didn’t think he would be able to stop bleeding.

“Get out of your head, Morgan.”

Morgan blinked at the order and Walter gave a kind smile as presence returned to those blue eyes.

Walter sat up, eyes roaming Morgan slowly. He could follow the blush that colored Morgan’s cheeks, down his neck and over his chest. Morgan did his best to ignore the worshiping gaze, suddenly feeling so very exposed. For the first time that night he felt shy, as if, in some odd way, he had let Walter down, though he wasn’t sure why. His shoulders tensed and his breathing caught in his chest.

Walter watched Morgan’s body tense and his smile dropped. He let a hand caress over Morgan’s hip and he leaned over to press a kiss to Morgan’s thigh. “Relax. You’re perfect. Nothing to be worried over,” Walter whispered. He guided Morgan’s knees open and continued to kiss down Morgan’s thighs.

“How do you know what you’re doing?” Morgan asked around a bit tongue.

“I might get bored with all of the girls I have,” Walter explained, the fingers that Morgan had slicked pressing carefully against Morgan’s entrance. There was a sharp inhale of air and Walter watched Morgan’s body seize up before slowly relaxing into the touch. He nipped gently on the inside of Morgan’s thigh as his fingers carefully caressed Morgan.

“Of course you watch porn,” Morgan muttered, an arm reaching up and covering his face that was growing brighter the longer Walter’s touched burning him.

“You don’t?”

“No. Why would I? What do you watch?” The words were rapid and Walter smiled.

“Men.” He bit a bit harsher against Morgan’s thigh, earning him a surprised gasp as he carefully pressed a single finger into Morgan. “Breathe, darling boy,” Walter instructed kindly, his movements pausing until Morgan gave a deep exhale, relaxing enough to let Walter push further in. Walter did his best to focus Morgan’s attention elsewhere in hopes of helping Morgan let go. “You must do something.” Morgan shook his head. “You can’t tell me you’ve never touched yourself.”

“I’m not that much of a prude,” Morgan defended, shifting a bit at Walter’s slow thrusting. A shiver ran through him and he couldn’t stop the sigh that left him. He nearly cried when Walter curled his finger just slightly.

“God,” Morgan whispered faintly, Walter just barely able to hear him. “That feels so good.”

“I’m glad.”

The room fell into an easy silence, Walter entranced with the simple perfection that was Morgan. He could happily keep Morgan here, working the boy to highs and lows all night. Whatever was happening, Walter never wanted it to end. All he knew was that this was a feeling that he liked and he wasn’t on drugs to enjoy it.

“I read.”

Walter glanced up at Morgan who was still hidden beneath his arm. It took a moment for Walter to connect the context, but when he did, his eyes scanned the room, taking in the bookshelves. How many of them were literature that Hannibal would not have approved of? How many were hidden gems that Morgan kept private?

“What do you read, Morgan?” Walter asked gently, adding a second finger and letting Morgan adjust to the stretch.

“Shit,” Morgan hissed, licking at his lips as his mind fogged over. “I-uh-I read erotic novels.” Walter began thrusting again and Morgan’s cock gave a painful twitch. Morgan exhaled, his lungs not giving him any choice in the matter and his arms shook. “They’re easier to hide than browsing history and cookies.”

“Do you read them in the living room?” Walter asked, free hand deciding to take pity on Morgan and stroke at his neglected length. The sound that came from Morgan was obscene and made a painful jolt shoot through Walter. “Quiet, darling boy.”

“Yes.”

Walter nearly snorted at the idea of Morgan reading quietly, curled up on the couch the way he always did, eyes reading some of the most outrageous books ever written and published. Something like Philosophy In Boudoir, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, Venus in Furs, or possibly 120 Days of Sodom. Something that looked old and would keep their parents from snooping.

“And here I was thinking that you were prim and proper,” Walter teased, curling his fingers again and making Morgan squirm. “How often did you have to excuse yourself? Do you think they know?”

“I don’t know,” Morgan whispered, mind buzzing, body shaking. Walter’s fingers hooked and brushed against something that Morgan couldn’t exactly describe, but it made his legs shake. A sound he couldn’t stop left his mouth and he jumped as the hand that had been stroking him covered his mouth while Walter chuckled.

“Shut up,” he ordered through the laugh. It quieted instantly when Morgan’s tongue licked at Walter’s palm and Walter fought back the shudder that wanted to run through him. He leaned up, putting a bit more weight over Morgan’s mouth. The breath from Morgan’s nose was fire against Walter’s hand. “You have got to stay quiet, kid.”

Morgan shot Walter a glare, and Walter smirked as he watched Morgan’s eyes roll back in his head as Walter’s fingers passed over the bundle of nerves once more. Morgan whimpered against Walter’s hand, leaning back onto Walter’s fingers. Walter’s gut clenched at the movement, something so alluring about Morgan chasing after his own pleasure greedily.

“Do you want my fingers or would you like-”

Morgan nodded, maneuvering his head just enough to bite down on Walter’s hand. “Fuck me,” he begged brokenly. “Please Walter. Please.”

Walter wasn’t sure if he had ever heard anything so sweet before in his life, something that made him groan and bite down hard on his bottom lip just to keep himself from cumming.

“I love when you beg, Morgan.” Walter panted as he pulled himself away, Morgan whining at the loss, an empty feeling left behind. “God, your mouth is a sin.” Walter pulled back, a hand trailing down Morgan’s stomach. “Do you have any lube, Morgan?”

“Top drawer,” Morgan answered, voice rough.

Walter smirked. “Of course you do.” Walter removed himself from the bed and opened up the bedside table’s drawer, pulling out a small bottle of clear liquid. “You should have told me earlier.”

“Your fingers felt good in my mouth.”

The admittance was small and Walter looked back to find Morgan slowly stroking himself. Walter’s knees went weak at the sight and he had to work hard to pull himself back together.

“Fuck,” Walter breathed, hoping that the desire wasn’t as present in his voice as it felt in his veins. He cleared his throat and looked at what was in his hands. “How do you want to-”

“I want to look at you,” Morgan cut in confidently. Walter’s chest tightened painfully and he let out a slow and steadying breath. His eyes looked over the boy who had more bruising blooming across his skin, the deep purple color nearly matching the duvet. “I want to look into your toffee sunshine eyes.”

Walter moved over to the bed and knelt down on it. “Come here,” he whispered. Morgan gave a slightly confused expression, but sat up. Walter’s hand slid to the back of Morgan’s neck and pulled him in for a kiss, making it deep until Morgan was gasping against him, trying to push the kiss further. Walter pulled back. “Don’t say things like that,” Walter whispered with a huff of laughter. “It makes me weak.”

“That’s only fair,” Morgan argued.

“Brat,” Walter hissed, kissing Morgan again. “Get comfortable.”

Morgan lied back into the blanket and watched as Walter added lube to his hand and rubbed it down his length. He took Morgan’s ankles and pulled him down the bed, smirk ever present. He placed Morgan’s legs around his waist and leaned over Morgan slightly.

“Do you treat your girlfriends like this?” Morgan asked into the comfortable silence.

“No,” Walter replied softly as he lined himself up and carefully pushed against Morgan’s entrance. “They do not receive the respect I show you. They are objects for my pleasure, not a person.”

“Objects?” Morgan asked, breath hitching at the wider stretch.

“Darling boy,” Walter hushed, hand brushing back Morgan’s waves from his face. “Let me know-”

“Walter.”

Walter leaned over a little more and captured Morgan's lips, effectively silencing the moan as he pushed all the way into Morgan’s tight heat. Morgan’s arms wrapped around Walter and Walter winced as Morgan's nails dug deeply into his back, kiss heavy with Morgan’s erratic breathing.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” Walter gasped between kisses from the younger boy beneath him. “Are you alri-”

“Walter,” Morgan said again, nails giving a sharp tug in Walter’s skin that pulled a groan from Walter. “Get out of your head.”

Walter breathed out a laugh, heat swallowing him. He licked his lips, eyes meeting Morgan’s. His hips rocked, pulling out before pushing back in. Morgan bit his lips between his teeth, muffling the cry from his throat and pulled Walter closer with his legs, driving Walter deeper.

Walter swallowed hard as he tried to focus enough to set a steady pace with his hips. He had to make this enjoyable for Morgan, not just a chase to the end, despite how badly his body was begging him to just take whatever he wanted.

Morgan did his best to keep his mind from fogging over, but it slowly encased his mind, slipping deep into Walter’s warmth, brutal kisses and sharp teeth. His body ached in the best way possible, a white hot tightness pooling in his stomach. A hand wrapped around his erection and Morgan couldn’t help but moan at the contact, being silenced with a rough kiss from Walter.

“God, you’re perfect Morgan,” Walter praised with a small laugh, voice soft. “But you need to stay quiet.” Morgan shook his head and was kissed by a smile.

“I-I’m close,” Morgan got out, mouth dry, skin prickling hot from the bite marks down to his toes that were curled. “Are you-”

“Focused on you,” Walter interrupted. Morgan moaned, breath caught in his throat. His gut tightened at the words and he forced his eyes to open and meet Walter’s flushed face, damp with sweat and those eyes that were glassy with their honied color. “Cum for me.”

It only took another thrust or two for Morgan to spill over Walter’s hand and across his stomach, gasping for air through the sticky heat of the room. And those damned brown butter eyes that started at him sent chills through his body, making Morgan’s nails drag down Walter’s back sharply.

“Shit,” Walter groaned, voice broken. Walter worked Morgan through his orgasm before his hips stuttered and he came, body going weak over Morgan’s. He leaned down and kissed Morgan as the waves slowly passed through him, arms struggling to keep himself upright as a burn set into them. “Fuck, Morgan.”

“Good?”

Walter panted with a nod, skin hot against Morgan’s. “Good.” He kissed the boy again before letting himself roll over so his arms didn’t collapse. Morgan shivered at the cold.

Walter blinked up at the ceiling, trying to catch his breath, shivering at the sound of Morgan's light whimpers in his breathing. His hand found Morgan's body and gently caressed the sweat laced skin.

“Let’s get you cleaned up, Morgan.” Morgan shook his head. All he wanted to do was be wrapped back up in Walter’s warmth and sleep. “I still need to take care of what’s mine, Morgan. Come shower with me and then I will let you rest.”

“You promised to kiss me all night,” Morgan reminded, receiving a laugh from Walter.

“God, you’re such a fucking spoiled brat.” Walter scolded with a bright smile, turning to face Morgan, a hand caressing Morgan's cheek and calling him to his side as well. Walter kissed Morgan. “Spoiled.”

“You promised,” was punctuated with another kiss.

“Pampered.”

“You promised.”

“Brat.”

“You promised.”

Walter smiled and got to his knees, pulling Morgan from the bed and into his arms. Morgan leaned his head against Walter’s as Walter walked them to the bathroom. Morgan was set on the counter top, the granite cold against his bare skin. The shower was turned on and Walter tested the water before returning to Morgan.

“Not still afraid of the water, are you?” he asked.

Morgan’s lips pulled into a soft grin. “Not with you here.”

The water was warm over Morgan’s skin as Walter guided him in. Walter’s touches were gentle, no bite to them despite what Morgan knew they were capable of. He cleaned Morgan head to toe and made sure to take special care of the bites that were deep reds and purples over Morgan’s neck, down his torso and thighs.

Morgan allowed Walter the warmth of the water and watched as the older one washed his body. Morgan could only follow the movements, captivated by the shifting muscles beneath tanned skin and ink. A sense of pride welled up in his chest when Walter turned his back to him, deep scratches set into his skin, some already beginning to heal over from having bled.

Morgan took the soap from Walter’s hand and Walter looked over his shoulder, watching as Morgan carefully washed the wounds. Walter winced when dried blood was scrubbed carefully from his skin, but he stayed still, the homeliness in Morgan’s touches too breathtaking to pull away from.

Both cleaned, Walter helped dry Morgan before leading the boy back to his room. He made swift work of changing the bedding, the duvet folded on the floor to be taken care of later, most likely needing to be dry cleaned if Walter knew anything about Hannibal’s spending habits. Walter found another blanket and tossed it over the bed.

“Would you like some clothes?” Walter asked, speaking for the first time since their shower. Morgan shook his head tiredly. “Some water?” Another shake of the head. “Then come to bed.”

Morgan obeyed, body weak. He lied down and let the comfort of the mattress pull him down into it as the blanket was pulled up over his body. His eyes slid shut as a kiss was kindly pressed to his head.

“Sleep well, Morgan.” There was a hesitance to the words and Morgan opened his eyes to see an unsure expression from Walter.

“Stay.” Morgan reached out, taking one of Walter’s hands. “I miss sharing a bed with you.”

“I’ve missed you too, Morgan,” Walter assured. “But we’ll be in enough trouble as is. We can’t afford to-”

Morgan shook his head, his grip tightening on Walter’s hand when the man attempted to pull away.

“Stay. Always stay with me after.” The words were rapid and caught Walter’s breath in a tight fist. “If we do this again, you don’t get to run off and leave. For once, be here with me.”

Walter placed a kiss on Morgan's knuckles with a nod in agreement. “Ok,” he whispered.

Morgan shifted over and let Walter turn off the lights before he crawled under the blanket as well.

“Hold me like you always do,” Morgan instructed softly. There was only fluidity to the motions as Walter reached through the dark, finding Morgan’s body and pulled it close to his. He tucked Morgan’s head under his chin, Morgan’s breath hot against his chest. His fingers played with Morgan’s waves just as they did on the nights he was allowed this closeness with Morgan. He

hoped that there would never again be a night apart from Morgan. “Do you do this for your girlfriends too?”

“Don’t compare yourself to them, Morgan,” Walter whispered, tightening his grip around Morgan. “You are not them and will never be them. You are mine, you are special, and I want to take care of you.”

“Yours,” Morgan echoed with a shiver. Walter would protect him, just as Walter had always done. Take care of Morgan like he always had.

“Mine.”

Morgan gave a small moan and buried his face into Walter’s bare chest. Walter smiled and placed a kiss to Morgan’s head as the boy yawned.

“Under the trees, without saying a word, he hugged her to his chest; their arms were wrapped around their bodies, and until dawn, as if sewn with strong threads, they did not loosen their grip,” Walter quoted softly, matching his breathing to Morgan’s.

“Despite the king and the guards, the lovers enjoyed their love,” Morgan whispered back faintly.

“Goodnight, Morgan.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me beta

# Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

What had they done? Or more so, what had Walter done?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The barely rising sun cast a warm glow across the bed and Will's eyes flickered open at the encroaching brightness. He inhaled deeply, taking in his surroundings slowly and enjoying the feeling of another day beginning without the erratic need to run for safety.

The room was filled with the sound of Hannibal's breathing and nothing more, the rain having finally stopped, the gentle pitter patter gone. Will smiled at the warm breath against the back of his neck, a heavy arm draped around his middle.

Will didn't often wake before Hannibal and even less so before the alarm went off. Hannibal always let him continue to sleep if Will wanted to and Will could only admit to taking full advantage of the options given to him. He had become more than content and happy in the luxuries provided to him from his husband and he was probably worse off for it.

Will didn't always indulge. Some days he did get up with Hannibal and Morgan and help with breakfast and classes, but most of the things that Morgan was being taught now were strictly medical and Will didn't have a hope in teaching him anything beyond the basics. Though, he found he was learning quite a few decent skills from Hannibal's teachings.

Will also made sure to stay in shape to continue to help train Morgan physically. The boy was stronger now. Nearly stronger than Will, but he was a bit cocky. A little bit of Walter in him. It had not been lost on Will how much of a role model Walter had been for Morgan growing up, so it wasn't surprising that the kid took on some of the older's traits.

Will made careful work of slipping from Hannibal's grip and making sure the man was still asleep. He deserved it, especially after the fit Will had had to coax from Hannibal the night before about smoking in the house, the scent strong for a while before it dissipated. Hannibal needed the rest. He didn't get nearly enough and it was beginning to show on the man's face, a deep etched tiredness.

Will's movements were quiet, but somehow still felt loud in the sleeping house. He made his way down the hall and into the main room, glancing around at the mess that was there. His brows pulled together in confusion, knowing fairly well that he had made sure the house was clean before going to bed. It was a purposeful habit he had started in an attempt to be nicer to Hannibal so Hannibal wasn't running around like a maid while also trying to be a father, teacher, chef, artist, husband, lover and killer all at the same time. There was too much for that man to do and Will did his best to lighten the load where and when he could.

He moved over to the island and took in the open and haphazardly dug through first aid kit. Bloody wipes littered the counter as did wrappers from medicine. The washer was full of clothes and was blinking that it was done drying them. The lamp was on and Will sighed.

What had they done? Or more so, what had Walter done? Morgan was far more level headed until Walter was around. He followed the rules to a T and had ever since he was a child. Getting Morgan to eat a cookie before dinner was like trying to solve the  Riemann Hypothesis. It was impossible. Unless Walter was there.

Will made quick work of cleaning the mess and returning items to where they belonged. It was better that Hannibal not find it. The smoking would be enough to worry about when everyone was finally awake. Hannibal was surely going to have words with Walter, which meant that breakfast would be awkward enough to get through.

Will began a pot of coffee with a yawn and then opened the dryer, pulling out the clothes from inside to begin folding them. The boys' clothes from the night before. Will rolled his eyes, doing his best not to let curiosity pull at him as he gathered up the items and went for the spare room.

He was about to knock on the door, but noticed the door partly ajar. He slowly pushed it open, greeted by cold morning air. The room was empty and Will immediately knew where his older son was. They had obviously fallen asleep together just as they had when they were kids. How long were they going to keep the habit up?

The window was wide open and showing where rain had found its way into the room. Will sighed at the smoke that still clung to the air, but tossed the clothes on the bed before going over to close the windows. He fetched a towel from the bathroom and cleaned up the floor.

Once everything was back in place, Will picked up Morgan’s clothes from the bed, leaving Walter’s behind. He stopped outside of Morgan’s room and quietly pushed open the door. He was going to set the clothes on the dresser, but stopped when his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the room. He blinked as a shock that he hadn’t felt in quite a few years flooded his system.

Will immediately regretted having stepped foot in the room and wished that more had been left to the imagination. Will quickly looked away, hands covering his face, though the sight of how far down the blanket had slipped showing the two boys very clearly naked was burned into Will’s mind.

Walter had a tight grip on Morgan whose back was pressed into Walter’s chest. Walter’s knuckles were bloodied and his eye was black. Morgan’s face was cut up and the bridge of his nose was bruised, as were his ribs among other parts of him. Markings that Will knew all too well from Hannibal, his husband unable to keep his teeth out of Will’s flesh.

Will inhaled deeply, lowering his hands and walking over to Walter’s side of the bed. He placed a hand on his son’s shoulder, unsure of what exactly the correct thing to do at this moment would be. There was a sharp inhale at being pulled from sleep and Walter lazily opened his eyes, them widening as they took in Will and he pushed himself up on his elbow.

“Dad?” he asked softly, voice broken with sleep.

The first words that came to Will’s head were what was hissed through his teeth in an attempt to keep his voice low to not wake Morgan who was still sleeping soundly. “Your father is going to fucking kill you.”

“He’s had twelve years,” Walter pointed out.

Will pinched the bridge of his nose, willing the migraine that was setting in to dissipate. “Do you have any idea how much trouble you would have been in if he came to wake Morgan for school?”

Walter rested his head back into the pillow, closed his eyes and licked his lips. “Are you going to tell him?”

“He’s going to figure it out. He’s not stupid, Walter,” Will stated with a sigh. He lowered his hand and snatched up the blanket. “Will you cover up, please?” Walter reached out, taking the fabric from Will and pulled it over the top of him and Morgan, though he still laid rather comfortably as if still halfway asleep. “I put your clothes in your room. Come have some coffee with me and we’ll discuss this, see if I can try to defuse the bomb before it goes off.”

Will was given a nod of understanding and he didn’t need anymore of an indication to leave the room, pulling the door closed behind him. He waited until he could hear movement behind the door to know Walter hadn’t fallen back to sleep, and he returned to the kitchen, pouring out two cups of coffee and adding some cream and sugar to Walter’s before starting another round. He was absolutely going to need more than one cup and it would be nice for Hannibal to have some when he woke.

Will looked up at movement and held out the mug to Walter who was wearing a set of Morgan’s work out clothes that surprisingly fit, though a little tighter in some areas than they were on Morgan.

Walter took the mug and took a drink of the burning liquid. Will walked over to the bar and opened a bottle of amber liquid, topping off his own cup and Walter rolled his eyes, but didn’t say anything.

Will went about opening up the curtains to the two large windows, letting dim sunlight fill the room before he sat at the small dining table. His eyes met Walter’s as he took a sip of his coffee, waiting for Walter to join him. Walter sighed and made his way over to the table, taking a seat across from Will. He kept his gaze on the mug held tightly between his hands.

“Are you hungover?” Will asked, taking in the way that Walter was wincing in the sunlight and looked pale and sick. Walter gave a small nod and Will chuckled nervously, taking another drink of his coffee. The mug was set aside and his finger tapped the tabletop, mind struggling with what sin to focus in on first. “You took Morgan drinking?” Another nod, head tipped down in what Will could only guess was either guilt or nausea. “How did you get him into the bar?”

“We borrowed one of the IDs from the safe. But they never checked it. This isn’t the US.”

Will lowered his coffee cup to the table and stared at his son who wouldn’t meet his gaze. “You broke into the safe? How the hell did you do that?”

“I know the code,” Walter admitted softly, hands nervously shifting the handle of the mug between them. “I’ve known about it since we moved to Italy. Father said all of our names in such an oddly specific order with his sister’s that I figured it meant something to him. It wasn’t hard to figure out.”

“Sentimental bastard,” Will grumbled, taking another longer drink of his cup, eyes going to the hall and making sure that the man didn’t appear at the cursing of him. “And the fight?” Walter sighed

and looked out of the window with a flinch, the sunlight making the bruising under his eyes look like a permanent marking. Will frowned. “Just please tell me that I’m not going to see it on the TV.”

“We didn’t kill anyone, if that’s what you mean,” Walter said with a bit of bite to his voice. His face softened and he quickly added: “Sorry. My head is killing me.”

“It’s an ample punishment for the moment,” Will muttered, receiving a roll of Walter’s eyes. “Are you going to tell me what happened, Wally?”

Walter’s body straightened and he looked back at his dad with a confused look. “You haven’t called me that in years.” The words were whispered.

“You respond better to it than your full name.” Will gave a shrug.

“You manipulating-”

“What did you two do?” Will pushed, ignoring the anger in Walter’s tone. “Please do not make me wake Morgan and get your father. I don’t want to pull teeth here.”

Walter rolled his eyes with a dramatic sigh that made Will nearly laugh out loud. The kids had both definitely taken after Hannibal with their theatrics, but it got them what they wanted. They knew when to use it and when to hold back, when to be charming and when to be cruel.

“There was a guy messing with Morgan in one of the bars. We tried to leave but he said something that pissed me off and I might have overreacted.”

“You hit him,” Will supplied knowingly.

Walter’s fingers began rubbing circles in his temples. “We left and he and his friends followed us. There was a bit of a tumble, but they were fine when we left. A few broken bones, no real harm done.”

Will blinked several times, taking in the tone of voice that made the whole evening sound more like a walk in the park instead of the drunken bar fight it was.

“What did he say?” It wasn’t important, but Will couldn’t lie and say he wasn’t curious. Not to mention, the more details he had to work with, the easier the entire situation would be when Hannibal woke.

Hannibal would be upset, but he would keep himself in check just as he always did when in the presence of company. It was only when they were alone and Will gave him the green light to vent that Hannibal would if he needed to. Hannibal knew better than to take his emotions out on the empath without expressed permission.

“Called Morgan a bitch or a whore or something. I don’t remember.” Walter waved his hand in dismissal and took another drink. “And he kept touching Morgan after he had been told to stop.”

“It was justified.”

“Self defense,” Walter agreed with a nod. “We know better than to go out of our way to mess with someone, Dad.”

“And then after...” Will trailed off, letting the words fall where they may. Walter nodded, not needing the rest of the sentence to understand. “He’s your brother.”

Walter gave a bitter laugh that caught Will a little off guard, the boy clearly annoyed. “The fuck he is.” Walter lowered his head, his hands digging through his hair. He looked back up, eyes dark. “Morgan has never been my brother. We are nowhere close to being related. We’re not legally adopted! You didn’t adopt him and Hannibal never adopted either of us. The only reason we’re all together is because we had nowhere else to go. We aren’t exactly a perfect family.”

Will bit his bottom lip, watching as Walter rested his head in his hand that was propped up on his elbow on the table. His other hand’s index finger was trailing the rim of his mug. There were many things he could have picked apart in that, and the one he chose he hoped would lighten the mood slightly.

“Hannibal?” Will rose a brow, causing a slight smile to come to Walter’s lips, though the boy continued to trace the mug.

“Father,” he corrected softly.

“Alright.” Will sat back in his chair with a deep breath. “How long has this been going on between the two of you?”

"Just yesterday."

Will gave Walter an incredulous look and watched as Walter shifted uncomfortably in the gaze. "Just yesterday?" Walter gave a nod and Will sucked on his teeth at the truth. Walter knew better than to lie. "You said you came back for Morgan?"

Walter lowered his face into his hands. “I said some really awful things before I left. I had to come back and make it right.”

"And you cheating on your fiancée with Morgan is you making it right?"

Walter groaned, the punch far too close to home for his liking. “You cheated on Mom,” he reminded harshly.

“We were separated.”

Walter repeated the words in a mocking whisper, but didn’t look up from where he had hidden himself. Will finished off his cup, ignoring the childish jab, and got to his feet to make another that he again topped off with alcohol.

“What are your plans?”

“My plans?” Walter finally looked up, seeming utterly lost. “My plans for what?”

“Are you just going to go back to your fiancée?”

Walter winced, eyes closed tightly as if in pain. “It’s not really official yet.” He was hiding, avoiding. He was so good at that. Look where it had gotten him. “I don’t even have a ring.”

“Walter.” The word was exasperated. “I am not in the mood for games and I can guarantee that your father is not-”

“I’ll break it off.”

There was a sharp exhale from Will and his face softened as he placed the alcohol aside to pick back up his coffee. He wasn’t sure if he had heard his son correctly. Wasn’t sure if he fully believed the commitment behind the words.

“Just like that?” Will moved back to the table, sitting down to meet Walter’s gaze head on.

Walter nodded. “She doesn’t mean anything to me. I know that sounds horrible and it is, but...” He groaned, laying his head on the table and covered it with his hands.

“It was sensible.” Will understood now. Everything Walter had done was the practical approach to life. It was exactly what Will and Hannibal had drilled into him.

“She wouldn’t ask questions if something happened with the two of you. I could handle family matters without upsetting the world around me and maybe that would be the closest thing I could get to normal. A wife, a kid or two, a job.”

“It would just be a life to hide behind, Walter. Would you want something-”

“I’m always playing a part.”

Will nodded, taking a drink of his coffee and wishing it was stronger. “And where does Morgan fall into your play?”

Walter’s chest clenched up at the accusation that Will was throwing at him. He knew that he was the eldest and that he should have been smarter than this. He knew that he was the trouble maker. He was always the one being punished, but just for once in his life he wished that when something happened that didn’t match Hannibal or Will’s ideas of the perfect life that he wasn’t painted as the villain.

He slowly sat up and met Will’s carefully guarded eyes.

“I’m not playing with Morgan,” he said in as assuring a voice as he could, trying not to come off as offended. “I’m not entirely sure how the things between us are going to work, but I want to...” Walter sighed in frustration, rubbing at his face and wondering how to best explain everything to Will so he understood. “Dad, I want to know what this is.”

“Ok.”

“And I would never hurt Morgan like that.” Walter couldn’t stop the defensiveness from creeping into his tone. “You fucking know I would never do anything to purposefully hurt him. So, you tell me what this is, Dad. What should I do? What should I say?” Will found himself struggling for an answer. “Is this what you feel with Father?”

Will was silent, slowly getting to his feet. He stepped over to one of the windows, letting the sunlight wash over him, enjoying the warmth before it could be drowned out by more rain. He closed his eyes and rubbed at them, deep in thought.

He had never been good with feelings or emotions and maybe that had been because of how many were always swirling around him, but he could let himself fall back into old habits. It was much easier to control now that he didn’t have to be around people more than his own family as much as

he liked. He didn't have to socialize if he didn't want to and it had been a breath of fresh air, and he finally felt normal.

But he could let himself dip into Walter's mind to try to better understand what seemed to be too difficult a subject to navigate. Because if all Will had ever wanted was to feel normal, then Walter's own emotions couldn't be too horrible separated from Will's.

The stress from school that was trying to be tamed with nicotine hit Will first, but Will couldn't blame his son. Will had dabbled in his youth, desperately searching for an escape even if it ended him permanently.

There was guilt from leading on a girl who was rather quite dull, but someone who fit the picture that Walter felt pressured to create and fit in. And even if Walter didn't have feelings for the girl, Walter had never been a monster. The guilt was more than enough proof.

There was something dark there, maybe a depression that Walter was fighting off. His own personal demons that they each faced. Maybe demons that Will had created. Demons that Will had forced onto his son and Walter now had to carry them for life.

There was pain, physical pain from the night before. A pounding headache from alcohol that was slowly being soothed by coffee. Eye and lip aching from the fight.

And finally, a confused light. That was exactly what Will had been looking for. Something that Walter couldn't fully express without letting himself be vulnerable. It would rip Walter apart if he let anyone else inside with him, but Will knew the appeal of finally letting someone in. It hurt and was a bitch to let happen, but it was worth it in the end.

"He thinks the world of you, Walter," Will finally said, glancing back at Walter who didn't look up from where he had once again hidden his face in his hands. "He sees universes knitted in your bones and galaxies in your eyes. And you adore him. You melt and cave for him at a moment's notice." Will turned around and gave Walter a soft smile. "And yes. That is how I feel about your father. I see the person under all of the fitted suits and the overbearing politeness." Walter gave a roll of his eyes. "I love him, Walter."

Walter frowned and shook his head. "That's a large word."

"It can be. It doesn't have to be."

A silence fell over them until the sound of a door closing in the hallway made Walter jump upright, readying himself to face Hannibal, a relief coming over him when it was just Morgan stumbling from his room with a hand to his head, clothes sloppily put on.

Will didn't miss the smile that covered Walter's lips at the sight of Morgan. Walter tried to get up from the table, but Will waved him back into his seat, heading over to the young boy. He took Morgan's face in his hands, looking over the cuts on his face. Morgan winced and tried to pull from his dad's grip, but Will held him in place.

"Let me see," Will instructed softly, tilting Morgan's head back a bit more so he could check that Morgan's nose wasn't bent out of place. Everything looked fairly clean and well taken care of. "How are you feeling?"

“Like an axe is embedded in my skull,” Morgan moaned, voice rough, throat feeling like sandpaper.

“You need some water.” Will released his hold on Morgan and went to fetch a glass. He filled it up and turned to find that Walter had come over and Morgan’s head was hidden deep in Walter’s chest, one of Walter’s hands gently caressing Morgan’s hair, the other on Morgan’s hip. Will cleared his throat and Morgan straightened up, Walter stepping away so Morgan could take the glass. “Drink all of that and then go back to bed.”

“What about class?” Morgan asked softly, as if his own voice were too loud for his ears.

“I will discuss it with Hannibal,” Will assured. “You need to rest. Sleeping is the best way to get through a hangover.” Morgan’s eyes seemed to widen at that and he met Will’s knowing gaze. “We will discuss that later, Morgan. Drink your water.”

Morgan did as instructed and when the glass was empty, he set it aside before reaching out and taking Walter’s hand. “Come with me,” Morgan whispered, but Will didn’t miss it. “I sleep better with you there.”

“We have a few more things to talk about Morgan,” Will interrupted, calling Morgan’s disappointed gaze to him.

“Alright.” Morgan’s hand pulled from Walter’s and returned to his pounding head. “Why isn’t Father up?”

“Do you want him to be up?” Will asked back. Morgan shook his head and groaned, face scrunching up. “Go back to bed, Morgan.” Morgan obeyed and Will turned to Walter with a deep breath. “I would suggest that you leave the house for a few hours while I take care of this.”

Walter’s brows furrowed. “What? Why me?”

“Because I said so.”

Walter scoffed, arms folding over his chest. “And go where exactly?”

Will shrugged. “Go to St. Giles or Edinburgh Castle. The view from there is quite breathtaking. You can take a tour of the royal jewels.” Will ran a hand through his hair, fingers getting tangled in his curls as they usually did. “Just stay out for a bit. This might take me a while.” Walter gave a curious look, but Will waved it away. “Take my jacket. It will probably start raining.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me.

# Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

> “What do you want, Will?”
>
> “What?” Will asked innocently against Hannibal’s neck.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The door shut after Walter left. Will found himself at the bar, pouring himself two fingers of straight whiskey. He downed them in one good swig before sighing and making his way back to his bedroom. He was slightly surprised to find Hannibal still asleep. Will nearly considered letting the man rest, but he knew that if he let this sit then he was going to be tied up in knots until Hannibal woke up. Ripping off the band aid was the best course of action.

Will sat on the edge of their bed and glanced over Hannibal’s face; it was gentle in its sleep. Carefree. Had Hannibal always looked like this when he slept, or had he only relaxed after Will was with him?

Will took a deep breath, calming his nerves, truly unsure what Hannibal’s beast was going to do. He leaned over, pressing his lips to his husband’s, kissing Hannibal deeply despite his unconscious state. There was a sharp inhale and an unrestricted moan from Hannibal at the contact and Will's hand gripped at Hannibal’s face.

“You taste like whiskey,” Hannibal whispered between kisses from Will.

“Been a morning,” Will replied back, pushing Hannibal from his side and onto his back so he could straddle Hannibal’s middle. He let his fingers tangle in silver locks as he rocked his hips against the killer’s. “Make it disappear?” Will bit into Hannibal’s neck and Hannibal gasped, hands taking Will’s hips as Will continued to rock against Hannibal, fingers now tugging at Hannibal’s hair.

“What happened?” Hannibal asked, but Will only shook his head, not answering. Hannibal groaned at a sharp bite and closed his eyes. “What do you want, Will?”

“What?” Will asked innocently against Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal’s hands left Will’s hips and took the man’s curls, pulling Will up to kiss him. “Don’t play stupid with me,” Hannibal instructed with a small smirk as Will’s body stuttered in its movements. “You only wake me up like this when you want something.”

“I have to want something to kiss you awake?” Will asked, still feigning innocence. “I just want you to trap me against the mattress and love me like you did the first time.” Will smiled at the shiver that ran through Hannibal. “Promise to be gentle with me.” Will leaned down and placed a soft kiss on Hannibal's lips. “Make me come undone with your mouth and your tongue and your lips and your words. Please Hannibal.”

Hannibal rolled them over until he was on top of Will and gave the empath a kiss that made Will's head spin. "I have to wake Morgan for his classes," Hannibal muttered, lips kissing at Will's cheek. Will shook his head with a small sigh.

"Let him sleep. The kids were up late last night. They need their rest."

"Doing what?"

"We can discuss that later." Will leaned up and tried to kiss Hannibal, but Hannibal moved away with a narrowed look. "Walter hasn't visited for months. Let Morgan have today off."

"That's all you want?" Hannibal asked suspiciously. "No classes today?"

"And you have to keep an open mind later," Will agreed, a hand sliding down to Hannibal's cheek to hold him in place so he could kiss him again. "Promise me you will stay calm when I tell you."

Hannibal's silence was gritty against Will's bones as Will watched the man weigh the options he had been given, trying to decide what was worth the secrecy. Will leaned up and placed a kiss to Hannibal's furrowed brow, receiving a surrendering sigh, but Hannibal didn't speak. Will kissed down the bridge of Hannibal's nose and his cheeks, nipping at the sharp cheekbones until Hannibal smiled. Will chuckled and lied back into the bed.

"You promise?" Will asked, knowing he had won. He usually did. If he had to guess, nine times out of ten he won the arguments because Hannibal was such a pushover for him. Only when it was a matter of extreme importance - or of life and death - did Will ever lose, and in those instances Will was too stubborn to admit Hannibal was right.

"I promise," Hannibal replied, leaning down to capture Will's lips once more. Will sighed into the kiss, hands tugging at Hannibal's shirt. Hannibal pulled back with a chuckle. "Are you still wanting more?"

"Just you."

Hannibal bent down and nuzzled at Will's jaw until Will tipped his head back, allowing Hannibal access to his throat. Will bit his bottom lip and felt a hot tongue against his artery. His body trembled as Hannibal's tongue, achingly slow, followed his pulse up his neck.

"Hannibal, I have..." Will trailed off with a sigh as a kiss pressed under his jaw.

"Yes, Will?"

"When we were in New York, I had fantasies of you tearing into my throat with your teeth."

"You make me sound like a vampire."

Will snorted with laughter. "You grew up in a castle in Lithuania, you're a count, and how often do I let you use my blood for your cooking?" Will shot back, feeling the way the air shifted at Hannibal's sharp detest. "And not like a vampire." Will moaned as teeth sunk deeply into his neck, eyes rolling back and hips thrusting up to find Hannibal's. "Like a killer, Hannibal. Like-" Will broke off with another cry at a harder bite. "Like you did to Dolarhyde."

Will swallowed as the front of his throat was attacked by sharp teeth, Hannibal's hips finally allowing the friction Will kept trying to find.

“Hannibal,” Will exhaled, name needy and desperate. “I said gently.”

“Do you know how much restraint I need to be gentle with you?” Hannibal demanded, ending his attack on Will’s neck and looking over Will’s blissful face. The blush on his cheeks made the summer sun bleached curls stand out, the gingerbread red breathtaking. Hannibal always missed the red tint in the winter and had considered asking Will to get highlights, but that would ruin the magic of the summer months when the sunlight did it so naturally. “And then you tell me you have fanta-”

“Gentle, Hannibal,” Will interrupted kindly. “I want slow and soft.”

“You always demand such difficult things, *mylimas* .”

“You spoil me.” Will smiled, pulling at Hannibal’s shirt once more, fingers trailing along the still well defined muscles in Hannibal’s back, just as strong and as powerful as they had been the first time Will had seen them. “Keep spoiling me.”

“ *Tiesiog paklausk.* ” *(Just ask.)*

Will shivered at the words. “You still make me melt even after I know what you’re saying.”

Hannibal gave a huff of laughter and slid a hand onto Will’s torso. “ *Ar dar nepavargote nuo manęs?* ” *(Aren't you tired of me yet?)* Hannibal grinned at the flutter of muscle under his hand and pressed a kiss into Will’s cheek.

Will shook his head. “I could never tire of you.”

“Gentle?”

“The softest you’ve ever been with me.”

Hannibal kissed Will again, this time softer than before. There was no urgency, no rush to it. His hands slowly slipped beneath Will’s shirt to unhurriedly trace the muscles in Will’s stomach, muscles that had been part of their own training to make sure everything and their family was taken care of. Not that either Morgan or Walter needed much of their help anymore, but they were ever careful.

Will’s body arched into Hannibal’s, trying to find more contact than what Hannibal was providing.

“Too soft, Hannibal.”

Hannibal chuckled and shook his head. He tutted Will and eased his husband’s body back into the bed with tender caresses. “You asked for it and now you have to live with what I give you, *godus berniukas . Būkite atsargūs norams.* ” *(greedy boy. Be careful with your wishes.)*

“That doesn’t translate very well,” Will mocked, fingers tangling in Hannibal’s hair when Hannibal kissed his stomach. “Be careful what I wish for?”

Hannibal hummed in agreement, lips brushing over Will’s abdomen. Will’s breath caught in his throat as the stubble from not having shaved yet that morning dragged across his skin, pricklingly bright.

Hannibal moved down Will's body and pulled at the waistline of his boxers. "You know, I spend all of this money on clothes for you and you don't wear them," Hannibal scolded, causing Will to laugh.

"I wear them," Will defended with a bright smile. "I wear the suits you got me every day."

"You don't wear the sleepwear I bought you."

"What you buy me to wear to bed and what I wear to sleep are completely different and should be kept separate," Will informed, caressing Hannibal's head as Hannibal kissed below Will's hips, dragging on the elastic there. "I am not wearing skin tight fabrics to sleep."

"I like you in fitted clothing."

"A little too fitted."

Hannibal shook his head and kissed at the dip in Will's thighs, licking at the skin there. Will sighed, eyes flickering closed.

"Nothing can be too fitted to your body," Hannibal pressed, glancing up to see a fond smile on Will's lips, fingers still kindly playing with Hannibal's hair. Hannibal couldn't remember the last time they had been lazy in the morning, the last time they had been serene and quiet and loving instead of hungry. It was a nice change of pace. "Everything should be exquisitely tailored and nothing less."

Will groaned with a laugh and tipped his head back. "Of course you have my lingerie tailored. Why would you not tailor my lingerie?"

"I don't drape you in lace or silk. Don't exaggerate," Hannibal reprimanded. "It's fitted underwear that you don't wear." Hannibal tugged on the elastic until it was around Will's thighs and he leaned down, licking over the head of Will's erection. There was a hiss from the empath and his grip immediately tightened in Hannibal's hair.

"I might as well be naked if I'm wearing it," Will said through his teeth, unable to see around the blinding white that was in his vision as Hannibal's tongue teased him. "Fuck. Why are you so good at that?"

"Language, darling boy," Hannibal warned softly before he pulled Will into his mouth. One of Will's hands left its grip in Hannibal's hair and went to his mouth so he could bite down on his thumb. Hannibal released his hold and Will whimpered at the loss of heat. "Will." His voice was stern and it sent a twitch through Will's cock. He knew exactly what he was doing wrong, but he wasn't sure he could be quiet if he didn't have something to bite down on. Will shook his head and Hannibal sighed. "You know better than to cover your mouth in front of me."

"I know," Will whispered out through a dry mouth, muffled by his hand.

Hannibal gave a small smirk and reached out, pulling Will's hand from his mouth. He looked over the bite marks that were in Will's thumb, deep and skin breaking. "We'll have to clean that," Hannibal chided, though there was no harshness to his tone. "You always bite too deep."

"You never seem to complain," Will shot back with a bright smile that made Hannibal roll his eyes, something not common for the man, and it made Will chuckle.

Hannibal's hand dropped Will's and found Will's cheek. His thumb traced Will's bottom lip as Will's tongue flicked out and licked across the pad of Hannibal's finger. Hannibal did his best to dismiss the shiver that trailed down his spine, and gave Will a stern look that only made the empath grin proudly. Hannibal snatched up Will's chin and drew Will closer, thumb pulling at his bottom lip.

"Behave."

"What happened to gentle?" Will taunted, but Hannibal didn't rise to the bait.

"I like to hear how good I make you feel." Hannibal's tone was even and Will wondered if the killer's heart was beating as madly as Will's was. "Do not cover your mouth again."

Will gave a huff, but still smiled, those blue eyes dazzling. Hannibal leaned up and gave Will a kiss, keeping it as soft as Will had asked for. Will exhaled deeply, eyes closing, something so sinful in the way Hannibal could make his entire person go tense and lax in the same moment.

Hannibal guided Will back down into the bed and returned to his earlier work, a hand taking the base of Will's length and his mouth taking the head once more. Will's moan was bright, and Hannibal hummed in approval. He enjoyed the sounds he could pull from the man. Enjoyed the sometimes screams that graced his ears. Enjoyed the tears and crying. But those came on harsher evenings than what this morning was going to be.

"Fuck," Will gasped when Hannibal took him all the way to the back of his throat.

Hannibal had learned early on all of Will's signals, the way he spoke what he needed in volumes that were not uttered words. When Will got lost in his own pleasure, the only words Will could spill out were curses and pleases and Hannibal's own name as he came. But Will's fingers and hips, his muscles and breaths might as well have been shouts.

Hannibal's free hand rested on Will's left hip, holding Will into the mattress so that Will didn't thrust into Hannibal's mouth. He could feel the fight against his hand as Will tried to all the same, obeying his body's wants.

There was strain in Hannibal's hair and sharp breathing through Will's nose. Hannibal was more than aware that he was being too light with his touching, too subtle and restrained with his mouth. He was being gentle just as Will had asked - excessively gentle - just to piss Will off.

A harsh tug to Hannibal's hair, something painful, called Hannibal's eyes to meet Will's begging blue.

Hannibal pulled his mouth from Will and received a disappointed sob. Hannibal ignored the sound as he sat up, Will's hands falling to the bed and clutching in the sheets. Hannibal made sure to keep a steady enough stroke on Will to keep him hard, but not anywhere near where he knew the boy wanted to be.

"Use your words, Will," Hannibal instructed.

Will groaned, head falling back into the bed. "Please."

"Please what?"

“Fuck you.” The words were sharp, but they only made Hannibal chuckle lowly, hand stilling. “No, please.”

He pulled his hand from Will, Will huffing in irritation and Hannibal smirked. “Am I being too gentle, Will?” Hannibal asked in a simple voice, something haughty that made Will glare. Will’s chest fluttered with his breath beneath the grey t-shirt he still wore. “Would you like more?” Will gave a desperate nod. “Do you want to cum in my mouth?” There was an aching sort of sound from Will’s throat as his head fell back and his eyes fluttered shut. “Is that a yes, *mielasis* ?”

Will rolled his jaw at the sound of the smile in Hannibal’s tone.

“Yes,” he grumbled, hating the way Hannibal played with him. Loving the way Hannibal played with him. The push and pull between them that always gave far too much and never quite enough.

Hannibal leaned over and wrapped his mouth around Will once more, his tongue teasing at Will’s slit. The noise that ripped from Will’s lungs was sinful. Will’s fingers were quick to let themselves tangle back into Hannibal’s hair, and Hannibal didn’t fight as Will thrusted into his mouth. He restrained Will too much. Will always played by Hannibal’s rules, but today could be different. Hannibal didn’t mind letting the boy use him from time to time. He didn’t mind giving the power over to Will. He didn’t mind letting Will chase his own pleasure and release.

Hannibal simply met Will’s thrusts with a slack jaw, but a working tongue. Anything to make Will feel good. Anything to help Will get to what Will wanted. Even if it meant being nothing but an object for Will. Hannibal would always be put back up in that perfect little box that Will kept him in after Will was done playing.

Will was close now. The grip in Hannibal’s soft hair was excruciating, his thrusts were unsteady and his toes were curled around the sheets beneath them. With a moan, Will’s hips stuttered and he fell back into the bed, breathing hard and shaking. He opened his eyes and watched as Hannibal worked him through his orgasm, swallowing without complaint.

Hannibal gave a final suck, making Will’s thighs tremble at the overstimulation. When Hannibal released him and looked up, Will could only stare as the man’s tongue swept out to catch some of the cum that was on his chin, something clenching painfully in Will’s gut. His head fell back into the bed, swearing loudly, his hands scrubbing at his face.

Hannibal crawled up Will’s body, leaning over to kiss at the rose’s blush over Will’s lips. He licked into Will’s mouth and Will circled his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders, pulling the man closer to him, enjoying his own taste mixed with Hannibal’s. Hannibal broke the kiss and Will’s dazed eyes flickered open, his chest rising and falling opposite of Hannibal’s, both breathing hard, lips swollen and red.

“Too gentle?” Hannibal asked and Will smiled with a small nod, licking at his lips as he rested back into the bed, a new found tiredness in his muscles. “Still alright, I assume?”

“You’re fucking perfect, Hannibal,” Will muttered, voice ragged. He tried to sit up, but Hannibal’s hand to his chest kept him in place. “Do you need anything Hannibal? I don’t mind-”

“I am perfectly content, Will,” Hannibal assured, sitting up and helping Will pull his boxers back up his legs. Will’s eyes flickered over Hannibal, uncertainty until Hannibal rose from the bed, shifting uncomfortably.

“Let me take care of you Hannibal. Please,” Will pushed, trying to sit up again, but a single look from Hannibal made him lay back down. He watched Hannibal move around the bedroom, fetching out new clothes for both of them to wear. “Please, Hannibal.”

Hannibal paused and glanced over at Will with a small smile. “You’re becoming lazy in your observations, Will.” Hannibal said as he came to lay out Will’s outfit on the foot of the bed. Will gave a curious look and glanced over Hannibal once more before a small moan left his lips and he quickly covered his face at the dark mess at the front of Hannibal’s sleep pants. “I am more than taken care of, Will.”

“Fuck, Hannibal. I didn’t even touch you.” Will lowered his hands from his face and was met with a kind smile.

“You didn’t have to.” Hannibal inhaled deeply and glanced around the room. “Get dressed. I’m assuming you and I have a lot to talk about.” Will gave a small nod, the conversation at hand slamming back into him and quickly wiping away the moment of calm in the storm he had been wading through all morning. “And stop swearing like a sailor. It’s unbecoming.”

Will laughed. “I am a sailor, and not as unbecoming as cumming in your pants.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to FyreFlye23 for helping me.

Also, sorry for the slow updates. I just discovered Crimson Rivers and haven't been able to stop reading for about 5 days straight.
https://archiveofourown.org/works/41690952/chapters/104582010

Go read it if you love your heart being torn apart. haha.

End Notes

Thank you all for you patience in getting this story worked on. If you read my update on the last story then you know the falling out I had with my last beta. A lot of my work was lost and I am slowly starting to put it all back together. I am not sure how regular updates will be. I do, currently, have about 40 chapters written with much more coming.
I would like to thank my previous beta, even though we are not speaking, because they did help me create a good portion of this story and the title, even if I am going through and heavily editing it. @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

For now I have met two people and they have both been helping me with this story greatly and getting me back on my feet after my falling out with my previous beta. Child of Lilith and a friend have helped and I don't think you'd have a story without them.

Thank you again. Much love to you all!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!